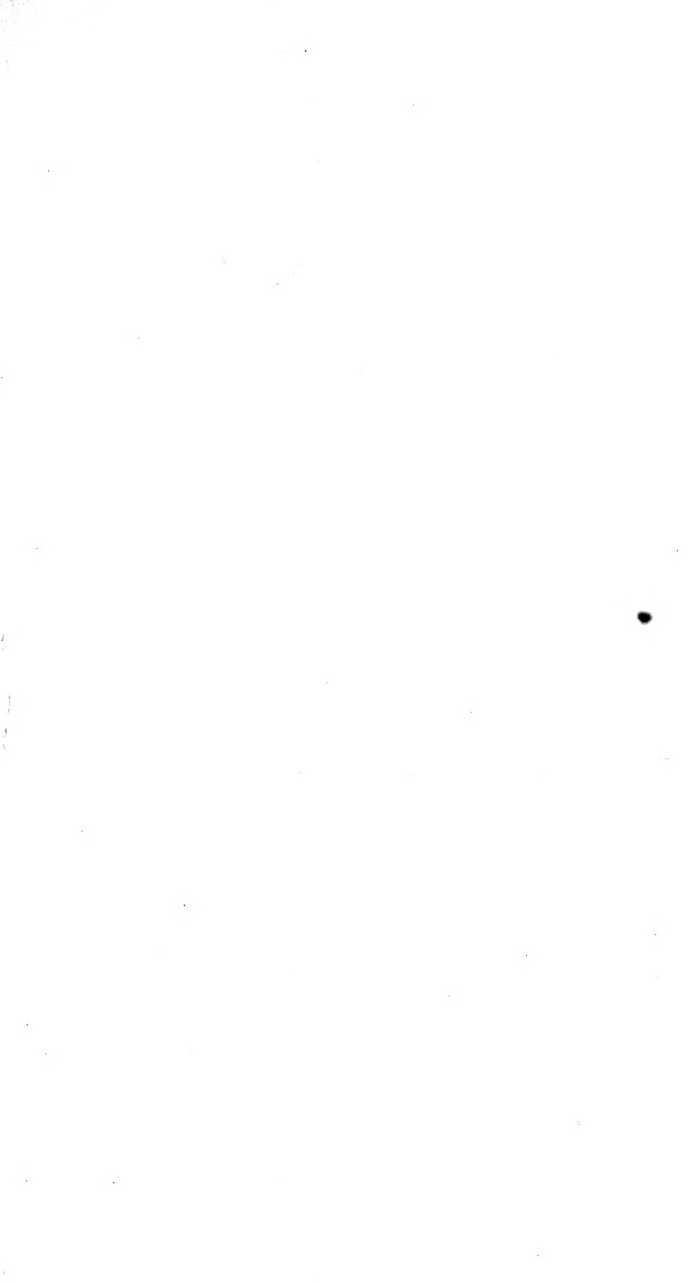


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THE
BIRTHRIGHT,

AND OTHER TALES.

BY MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF

"THE BANKER'S WIFE," "THE MAN OF FORTUNE," &c.

IN THREE VOLS.

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OLD FAMILIES AND NEW.

CHAPTER I.

PEOPLE are fond of talking of the hereditary feuds of Italy,—the factions of the Capulets and Montagues, the Orsini and Colonne,—and, more especially, of the memorable *Vendette* of Corsica;—as if hatred and revenge were solely endemic in the regions of

The Pyrenean and the river Po.

Mere prejudice!—There is as good hating going on in England as elsewhere. Independently of the personal antipathies generated by politics, and the envy, hatred, and malice arising out of every election contest, not a country neighbourhood but has its raging factions; and Browns and Smiths often cherish and maintain an antagonism every whit as bitter as that of the sanguinary progenitors of Romeo and Juliet.

I, for instance, who am but a country gentleman in a small way,—an obscure bachelor, abiding from year's end to year's end on my insignificant farm,—have witnessed things in my time, which, had they been said and done nearer the tropics, would have been cited far and near in evidence of the turbulence of human passions; and that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Seeing that they chanced in a lonely parish in Cheshire, no one has been at the trouble to note their strangeness; though, to own the truth, none but the actors in the drama (besides myself, a solitary spectator,) are cognizant of its incidents and catastrophe. I might boast, indeed, that I alone am thoroughly in the secret. For it is the spectator only who competently judges the effects of a scene; and merely changing the names, for reasons easily conceivable, I ask leave to relate, in the simplest manner, a few facts in evidence of my assertion that England has its Capuletti e Montecchi as well as Verona.

In the first place, let me premise that I am neither of a condition of life nor condition of

mind, to mingle as a friend with those of whose affairs I am about to treat so familiarly; being far too cròtchety a fellow not to prefer a saunter with my fishing-tackle on my back, or an evening *tête-à-tête* with my library of quaint old books, to all the good men's feasts ever eaten at the cost of a formal country visit. Nevertheless, I am not so cold of heart as to be utterly devoid of interest in the destinies of those whose turrets I see peering over the woods that encircle my corn-fields; and as the good old housekeeper who for these thirty years past has presided over my household, happens to have grandchildren high in service in what are called the two great families in the neighbourhood, scarcely an event or incident passes within their walls that does not find an echo in mine. So much in attestation of my authority. But for such an introduction behind the scenes, much of the stage business of this curious drama would have escaped my notice, or remained incomprehensible.

I am wrong to say the two great "families;" I should have said the two great "houses." At

the close of the last century, indeed, our parish of Lexley contained but one; one which had stood there since the days of the first James, nay, even earlier;—a fine old manorial hall of grand dimensions and stately architecture, of the species of mixed Gothic so false in taste but so ornamental in effect, which is considered as betraying the first symptoms of Italian innovation.

The gardens extending in the rear of the house were still more decidedly in the Italian taste; having clipped evergreens and avenues of pyramidal yews, which, combined with the intervening statues, imparted to them something of the air of a cemetery. There were fountains, too, which, in the memory of man, had been never known to play;—the marble basons being, if possible, still greener than the grim visages of fauns and dryads standing forlorn on their dilapidated pedestals amid the neglected alleys.

The first thing I remember of Lexley Hall, was peeping as a child through the stately iron gratings of the garden which skirted a by-

road leading from my grandfather's farm.—The desolateness of the place overawed my young heart. In summer time, the parterres were overgrown into a wilderness. The plants threw up their straggling arms so high, that the sunshine could hardly find its way to the quaint old dial that stood there telling its tale of time, though no man regarded; and the cordial fragrance of the strawberry-beds, mingling with entangled masses of honeysuckle in their exuberance of midsummer blossom, seemed to mock me, as I loitered in the dusk near the old gateway, with the tantalizing illusions of a fairy tale,—like the Barmecide's feast, or Prince Desire surveying his princess through the impermeable walls of her crystal palace.

But if the enjoyment of the melancholy old gardens of Lexley Hall were withheld from *me*, no one else seemed to find pleasure or profit therein. Sir Laurence Altham, the lord of the manor and manor-house, was seldom resident in the county. Though a man of mature years, (I speak of the close of the last century), he was still a man of pleasure;—the ruined hulk of the

gallant vessel which, early in the reign of George III., had launched itself with unequalled brilliancy on the sparkling current of London life.

At that time, I have heard my grandfather say, there was not a mortgage on the Lexley estate ! The timber was notoriously the finest in the county. A whole navy was comprised in one of its coppices ; and the arching avenues were imposing as the aisles of our Gothic minsters. Alas ! it needed the lapse of only half a dozen years to lay bare to the eye of every casual traveller the ancient mansion, so long

Bosom'd high in tufted trees,

and only guessed at till you approached the confines of the court-yard.

It was Hazard that effected this. The dice-box swept those noble avenues from the face of the estate. Soon after Sir Laurence's coming of age, almost before the church-bells had ceased to announce the joyous event of the attainment of his majority, he was off to the Continent—

Paris — Italy — I know not where; and was thenceforward only occasionally heard of in Cheshire as the ornament of the Sardinian or Austrian courts. But these tidings were usually accompanied by a shaking of the head from the old family steward. The timber was to be thinned anew,—the tenants again amerced. Sir Laurence evidently looked upon the Lexley property as a mere hotbed for his vices. At last the old steward turned surly to our inquiries, and would answer no further questions concerning his master. My grandfather's small farm was the only plot of ground in the parish that did not belong to the estate; and from him the faithful old servant was as careful to conceal the family disgraces, as to maintain the honour of Sir Laurence's name in the ears of his grumbling tenants.

The truth, however, could not long be withheld. Chaisesful of suspicious-looking men in black arrived at the hall; lawyers, surveyors, auctioneers,—I know not what. There was talk in the parish about foreclosing a mortgage, no one exactly understood why or by whom.

But it was soon clear that Wightman, the old steward, was no longer the great man at Lexley. These strangers bade him come here and go there, exactly as they chose; and, unhappily, they saw fit to make his comings and goings so frequent and so humiliating, that before the close of the summer, the old servitor betook himself to his rest in a spot where all men cease from troubling.—The leaves, that dreary autumn, fell upon his grave.

According to my grandfather's account, however, few, even of his village contemporaries, grieved for old Wightman. They felt that Providence knew best; that the old man was happily spared the mortification of all that was likely to ensue. For before another year was out, the ring-fence which had hitherto encircled the Lexley property, was divided within itself: a paltry distribution of about a hundred acres alone remaining attached to the old hall. The rest was gone!—The rest was the property of the forecloser of that hateful mortgage.

Within view of the battlements of the old manor-house, nearly a hundred workmen were

soon employed in digging the foundations of a modern mansion of the noblest proportions. The new owner of the estate, though only a manufacturer from Congleton, chose to dwell in a palace ; and by the time his splendid Doric temple was complete, under the name of Lexley Park, the vain-glorious proprietor, Mr. Sparks, had taken his seat in Parliament for a neighbouring borough.

Little was known of him in the neighbourhood beyond his name and calling ; yet already his new tenants were prepared to oppose and dislike him. Though they knew quite as little personally of the young Baronet by whom they had been sold into bondage to the unpopular clothier,—him, with the caprice of ignorance, they chose to prefer. They were proud of the old family,—proud of the hereditary lords of the soil,—proud of a name connecting itself with the glories of the reign of Elizabeth, and the loyalty shining, like a sepulchral lamp, through the gloomy records of the House of Stuart. The banners and escutcheons of the Althams were appended in their parish church. The

family vault sounded hollow under their tread whenever they approached its altar. Where was the burial-place of the manufacturer? In what obscure churchyard existed the mouldering heap that covered the remains of the sires of Mr. Jonas Sparks? Certainly not at Lexley! Lexley knew not, and cared not to know, either him or his. It was no fault of the parish that its young Baronet had proved a spendthrift and alienated the inheritance of his fathers; and, but that he had preserved the manor-house from desecration, they would perhaps have ostracized him altogether, as having lent his aid to disgrace their manor with so noble a structure as the porticoed façade of Lexley Park!

Meanwhile the shrewd Jonas was fully aware of his unpopularity and its origin; and, during a period of three years, allowed his ill-advised subjects to chew, unmolested, the cud of their discontent.—Having a comfortable residence at the further extremity of the county, he visited Lexley only to overlook the works, or notice the placing of the costly new furniture;

and the grumblers began to fancy they were to profit as little by their new masters as by their old. The steward who replaced the trusty Wightman, and had been instructed to legislate among the cottages with a lighter hand, and distribute Christmas benefaction in a double proportion, was careful to circulate in the parish an impression that Mr. Sparks and his family did not care to inhabit the new house till the gardens were in perfect order, the succession houses in full bearing, and the mansion thoroughly seasoned. But the Lexleyans guessed the truth,—that he had no mind to confront the first outbreak of their ill-will.

Nearly four years elapsed before he took possession of the place: four years, during which Sir Laurence Altham had never set foot in the hall, and was heard of only through his follies and excesses; and when at length Mr. Sparks made his appearance, with his handsome train of equipages, and surrounded by his still handsomer family, so far from meeting him in sullen silence, the tenantry began to regret that they had not erected a triumphal arch of evergreens

for his entrance into the park, as had been proposed by the less eager of the Althamites.

After all, their former prejudice in favour of the young Baronet was based on very shallow foundations. What had he ever done for them, except raise their rents and prosecute their trespasses? It was nothing that his forefathers had endowed almshouses for their support, or served up banquets for their delectation.—Sir Laurence was an absentee,—Sir Laurence was as the son of the stranger. The fine old kennel stood cold and empty, reminding them that to preserve their foxes was no longer an article of Lexley religion; and if any of the old October brewed at the birth of the present Baronet, still filled the oaken hogsheads in the cellars of the hall, what mattered it to them?—No chance of their being broached, unless to grace the funeral feast of the lord of the manor!—

To Jonas Sparks, Esq. M.P., accordingly, they dedicated their allegiance. A few additional chaldrons of coals and pairs of blankets, the first frosty winter, bound them his slaves for ever. Food, physic, and wine, were liberally

distributed to the sick and aged whenever they repaired for relief to the Doric portico ; and, with the usual convenient memory of the vulgar, the Lexleyans soon began to remember of the Altham family only their recent backslidings and ancient feudal oppressions : while of the Sparkses they chose to know only what was evident to all eyes—viz., that their hands were open and faces comely.

Into their hearts,—more especially into that of Jonas, the head of the house,—they examined, not at all ; and were ill-qualified to surmise the intensity of bitterness with which, while contemplating the beauty and richness of his new domain, he beheld the turrets of the old hall rising like a statue of scorn above the intervening woods. There stood the everlasting monument of the ancient family,—there the emblem of their pride, throwing its shadow, as it were, over his dawning prosperity ! But for the force of contrast thus afforded, he would scarcely have perceived the newness of all the objects around him,—the glare of the fresh free-stone,—the nakedness of the whited walls. A

few stately old oaks and elms, apparently coeval with the ancient structure which a sort of religious feeling had preserved from the axe that they might afford congenial shade to the successor of its founder, seemed to impart meanness and vulgarity to the tapering verdure of *his* plantations; his modern trees—his pert poplars and mean larches,—his sycamores and planes. Even the incongruity between his solid new paling and the decayed and sun-bleached wood of the venerable fence to which it adjoined, with its hoary beard of silvery lichen, was an eyesore to him. Every passer by might note the limit and circumscription dividing the new place from the ancient seat of the lords of the manor.

Yet was the landscape of Lexley Park one of almost unequalled beauty. The Dee formed a noble ornament to its sweeping valleys; while the noble acclivities were clothed with promising woods, opening by rich vistas to a wide extent of champaign country. A fine bridge of granite, erected by the late Sir Windsor Altham, formed a noble object from the windows of the new

mansion ; and but for the evidence of the venerable pile that stood like an abdicated monarch surveying its lost dominions, there existed no external demonstration that Lexley Park had not, from the beginning of time, formed the estated seat of the Sparkses.

The neighbouring families, if “neighbouring” could be called certain of the nobility and gentry who resided at ten miles’ distance, were courteously careful to inspire the new settler with a belief that they, at least, had forgotten any antecedent state of things at Lexley. For they had reason to congratulate themselves on the change.—Jonas had long been strenuously active in the House of Commons in promoting county improvements. Jonas was useful as a magistrate, and invaluable as a liberal contributor to the local charities. During the first five years of his occupancy, he did more for Lexley and its inhabitants than the half-dozen previous baronets of the House of Altham.

Of the man he had superseded, meanwhile, it was observed that Mr. Sparks was judiciously careful to forbear all mention. It might have

been supposed that he had purchased the estate of the Crown or the Court of Chancery, so utterly ignorant did he appear of the age, habits, and whereabouts of his predecessor; and when informed by Sir John Wargrave, one of his wealthy neighbours, that young Altham was disgracing himself again,—that at the public gaming-tables at Töplitz he had been a loser of thirty thousand pounds,—the cunning *parvenu* listened with an air of as vague indifference as if he were not waiting with breathless anxiety the gradual dissipation of the funds secured to the young spendthrift by the transfer of his estate, to grasp at the small remaining portion of his property. Unconsciously, when the tale of Sir Laurence's profligacy met his ear, he clenched his griping hand, as though it already recognized its hold upon the destined spoil.—But not a word did he utter.

Meanwhile, the family of the new squire of Lexley were winning golden opinions on all sides. "The boys were brave—the girls were fair," the mother virtuous, pious, and unpretending. It would have been scandalous, in-

deed, to sneer to shame the modest cheerfulness of such people, because their ancestors had not fought in the Crusades. By degrees, they assumed an honourable and even eminent position in the county; and the first time Sir Laurence Altham condescended to visit the county-palatine, he heard nothing but commendations and admiration of the charming family at Lexley Park.

“Charming family!—a Jonas Sparks, and charming!” was his supercilious reply. “I rejoice to find that the *fumier* I have been forced to fling on my worn-out ancestral estate is fertilizing its barrenness. The village is probably the better for the change. But, as regards the society, I must be permitted to mistrust the attractions of the brood of a Congleton manufacturer.”

The young Baronet, who now, though still entitled to be called young, was disfigured by the premature defeatures of a vicious life, mistrusted it all the more, when, on visiting the old hall, he was forced to recognize the improvements effected in the neighbouring property

(that he should be forced to call it *neighbouring*) ! by the judicious administration of the new owner. It was impossible to deny that Mr. Sparks had doubled its value, while enhancing its beauties. The low grounds were drained, the high lands planted, the river widened, the forestry systematically organized. The estate appeared to have attained new strength and vigour when dissevered from the old manor-house ; whose shadow might be supposed to have exercised a baleful influence on the lands wherever it presided.

But it was not his recognition of this that was likely to animate the esteem of Sir Laurence Altham for Mr. Jonas Sparks. On the contrary, he felt every accession of value to the Lexley property as so much subtracted from his belongings ; and his detestation of the upstarts whose fine mansion was perceptible from his lordly towers, like a blot upon the fairness of the landscape, increased with the increase of their prosperity.

Without having expected to take delight in a sojourn at Lexley Hall,—a spot where he had

only resided for a few weeks now and then, from the period of his early boyhood,—he was not prepared for the excess of irritation that arose in his heart on witnessing the total estrangement of the retainers of his family. For the mortification of seeing a fine new house, with gorgeous furniture, and a pompous establishment, he came armed to the teeth. But no presentiments had forewarned him that at Lexley, the living Althams were already as much forgotten as those who were sleeping in the family vault.—A sudden glow pervaded his frame when he chanced to encounter on the highroad the rich equipage of the Sparkses, and imprecations burst from his lips, when, on going to the window of a morning to examine the state of the weather for the day, the first object that struck him was the fair mansion in the plain below, laughing as it were in the sunshine, the deer grouped under its fine old trees, and the river rippling past its lawns as if delighting in their verdure.—Yes! there was decided animosity betwixt the hill and the valley.

Every successive season served to quicken the

pulses of this growing hatred. Whether on the spot or at a distance, a thousand aggravations sprang up betwixt the parties: disputes between gamekeepers, quarrels between labourers, encroachments by tenants. Every thing and nothing was made the groundwork of ill-will. To Sir Laurence Altham's embittered feelings, the very rooks of Lexley Park seemed evermore to infringe upon the privileges of the rookery at Lexley Hall; and when, in the parish church, the new squire (or rather his workmen, for he was absent at the time attending his duties in Parliament) inadvertently broke off the foot of a marble cherub, weeping its alabaster tears at the angle of a monument to the memory of a certain Sir Wilfred Altham, of the time of James II., (in raising the woodwork of a pew occupied by Mr. Sparks's family), the rage of Sir Laurence was so excessive as to be almost deserving of a strait-waistcoat!—

CHAPTER II.

THE enmity of the Baronet was all the more painful to himself that he felt it to be harmless against its object. In every way, Lexley Park had the best of it. Jonas Sparks was not only rich in a noble income, but in a charming wife and promising family. Every thing prospered with him; and as to mere inferiority of precedence, it was well known that he had refused a baronetcy; and many people even surmised that, so soon as he was able to purchase another borough and give a seat in Parliament to his second son as well as resign his own to the eldest, he would be promoted to the Upper House.

The only means of vengeance, therefore, possessed by the vindictive man whose follies and

vices had been the means of creating this perpetual scourge to his pride, was withholding from him the purchase of the remaining lands indispensable to the completion of his estate, more especially as regarded the water-courses, which, at Lexley Park, were commanded by the sluices of the higher grounds of the hall; and mighty was the oath sworn by Sir Laurence that, come what might, however great his exigencies or threatening his poverty, nothing should induce him to dispose of another acre to Jonas Sparks. He was even at the trouble of executing a will, in order to introduce a clause imposing the same reservation upon the man to whom he devised his small remaining property,—the heir-at-law, to whom, had he died intestate, it would have descended without conditions.

“The Congleton shopkeeper,” muttered he, (whenever, in his solitary evening rides, he caught sight of the rich plate-glass windows of the new mansion, burnished by the setting sun), “shall never, never lord it under the roof of my forefathers! Wherever else he may set his plebeian foot, Lexley Hall shall be sacred.

Rather see the old place burned to the ground, —rather set fire to it with my own hands,— than conceive that, when I am in my grave, it could possibly be subjected to the rule of such a barbarian !” •

For it had reached the ears of Sir Laurence— of course, with all the exaggeration derived from passing through the medium of village gossip— that a thousand local legends concerning the venerable mansion, sanctified by their antiquity in the ears of the family, afforded a fertile source of jesting to Jonas Sparks. The hall abounded in concealed staircases and iron hiding-places, connected with a variety of marvellous traditions of the civil wars ; besides a walled-up suite of chambers, haunted, as becomes a walled-up suite of chambers ; and justice-rooms and tapestried rooms, to which the long abandonment of the house and heated imaginations of the few menials left in charge of its desolate vastness, attributed romances likely enough to have provoked the laughter of a matter-of-fact man like the owner of Lexley Park.—But neither Sir Laurence nor his old servants were able to

forgive this insult offered to the family legends of a house which had little else left to boast of. Even the neighbouring families were displeased to hear them derided; and my grandfather never liked to hear a joke on the subject of the coach-and-four which was said to have driven into the court-yard of the hall on the eve of the execution of the rebel lords in 1745, having four headless inmates, who were duly welcomed as guests by old Sir Robert Altham. Nay, as a child, I had so often thrilled on my nurse's knees during the relation of this spectral visitation, that I own I felt indignant if any one presumed to laugh at a tale which had made me quake for fear.

Among those who were known to resent the familiar tone in which Mr. Sparks had been heard to criticise the pomps and vanities exhibited at Lexley Hall by the Althams of the olden time, was a certain General Stanley, who, inhabiting a fine seat of his own at about ten miles' distance, was fond of bringing over his visitors to visit the old hall, as an interesting specimen of county antiquity. *He* knew the

peculiarities of the place, and could repeat the traditions connected with the hiding-places better than the housekeeper herself; and I have heard her say it was a pleasure to hear him relating these historical anecdotes with all the fire of an old soldier, and see his venerable grey hair blown about as he stood with his party on the battlements, pointing out to the ladies the fine range of territory formerly belonging to the Althams. The old lady protested that the General was nearly as much grieved as herself to behold the old mansion so shorn of its beams; and certain it is, that once when, on visiting the hall, after Sir Laurence had been some years an absentee, he found the grass growing among the disjointed stones of the cloisters and justice-hall, he made a handsome present to one of the housekeeper's nephews, on condition of his keeping the purlieu of the venerable mansion free from such disgraceful evidences of neglect.

All this eventually reached the ears of the Baronet; but instead of making him angry, as might have been expected, from one so tetchy and susceptible, he never encountered General

Stanley, either in town or country, without demonstrations of respect. Though too reserved and morose for conversation, Sir Laurence was observed to take off his hat to him with a respect he was never seen to show towards king or queen.

About this time I began to take personal interest in the affairs of the neighbourhood, though my own were now of a nature to engross my attention. By my grandfather's death, I had recently come into the enjoyment of the small inheritance which has sufficed to the happiness of my life; and, renouncing the profession for which I was educated, I settled permanently at Lexley.

Well do I remember the melancholy face with which the good old rector, the very first evening we spent together, related to me, in confidence, that he had three years' dues in arrear to him from Lexley Hall; and that so wretched was the state of Sir Laurence's embarrassments, that, for more than a year, his dread of arrest had kept him a close prisoner in his house in London.

“ We have not seen him here this six years!” observed Dr. Whittingham; “ and I doubt whether he will ever again set foot in the county. Since an execution was put into the hall, he has never crossed the threshold, and I suspect never will. Far better were he to dispose of the property at once! Dismembered as it is, what pleasure can it afford him? And, since he is unlikely to marry and have heirs, there is less call upon him to retain this remaining relic of family pride; yet I am assured—nay, have good reason to know, that he has refused a very liberal offer on the part of Mr. Sparks. Malicious people do say, by the way, that it was by the advice of Sparks’s favourite attorneys the execution was enforced, and that no means have been left unattempted to disgust him with the place. Yet he is firm, you see; and persists in disappointing his creditors, and depriving himself of the comforts of life, merely in order that he may die, as his fathers did before him,—Lord of Lexley Hall!”

“ I don’t wonder!” said I, with the dawning sentiments of a landed proprietor.—“ ’Tis a

splendid old house, even in its present state of degradation ; and, by Jove ! I honour his pertinacity.”

Thus put upon the scent, I sometimes fancied I could detect wistful looks on the part of my prosperous neighbour of the park, when, in the course of Dr. Whittingham’s somewhat lengthy sermons, he directed his eyes towards the carved old Gothic tribune, in the parish church, containing the family-pew of the Althams ; and whenever I happened to encounter him in the neighbourhood of the hall, his face was as pointedly averted from the house, as if the mere object were an offence. I could not but wonder at his vexation ; being satisfied in my own mind that, sooner or later, the remaining heritage of the spendthrift must fall to his share.

Judge, therefore, of my surprise, when one fine morning, as I sauntered into the village, I found the whole population gathered in groups on the little market-place ; and discovered from the incoherent exclamations of the crowd that “ the new proprietor of the hall had just driven through in a chaise-and-four ! ”—

Yes—"the new proprietor!"—The place was sold!—The good doctor's prediction was verified.—Sir Laurence was never more to return to Lexley Hall!—

The satisfaction of the villagers almost equalled their surprise on finding that General Stanley was their new landlord. It suited them much better that there should be two families settled on the property than one; and as it was pretty generally reported that, in the event of Sparks becoming the purchaser, he intended to demolish the old house, and reconsolidate the estate around his own more commodious mansion, right glad were they to find it rescued from such a sentence.—General Stanley, who was the father of a family, would probably settle the hall on one of his daughters, after placing it in the state of repair so much needed.

When the chaise-and-four returned, therefore, a few hours afterwards, through the village, the General was loudly cheered by his subjects. His partiality for the place was so well known at Lexley, that already these people seemed to behold in him the guardian

of a monument so long the object of their pride.

For my own part, nothing surprised me so much in the business as that Sparks should have allowed the purchase to slip through his fingers. It was worth thrice as much to *him* as to any body else. It was the keystone of his property. It was the one thing needful to render Lexley Park the most perfect seat in the county. But I was not slow in learning (for every thing transpires in a small country neighbourhood) that whatever *my* surprise on finding that the old hall had changed its master, that of Sparks was far more overwhelming; that he was literally frantic on finding himself frustrated in expectations which formed the leading interest of his declining years. For the progress of time, which had made *me* a man and a landed proprietor, had converted the stout active squire into an infirm old man; and it was his absorbing wish to die sole owner of the whole property to which the baronets of the Altham family were born.

He even indulged in expressions of irritation,

which nearly proved the means of commencing this new neighbourhood by a duel; accusing General Stanley of having possessed himself by unfair means of Sir Laurence's confidence, and employed agents, underhand, to effect the purchase. In consequence of these groundless representations, it transpired in the county that the decayed Baronet had actually volunteered the offer of the estate to the veteran proprietor of Stanley Manor; that he had *solicited* him to become the proprietor; and even accommodated him with peculiar facilities of payment, on condition of his inserting in the title-deeds an express undertaking, never to dispose of the old hall, or any portion of the property, to Jonas Sparks of Lexley Park, or his heirs for ever. The solicitor by whom, under Sir Laurence's direction, the deeds had been prepared, saw fit to divulge this singular specification, rather than a hostile encounter should run the risk of embruining in blood the hands of two grey-haired men.

Excepting as regarded the disappointment of our wealthy neighbour, all was now established

on the happiest footing at Lexley. The reparations instantly commenced by the General, gave employment throughout the winter to our workmen; and the evils arising from an absentee landlord began gradually to disappear. It was a great joy to me to perceive that the new proprietor of the hall had the good taste to preserve the antique character of the place in the minutest portion of his alterations; and though the old gardens were no longer a wilderness, not a shrub was displaced;—not a mutilated statue removed. The furniture had been sold off at the time of the execution; and that which came down in cart-loads from town to replace it, was rigidly in accordance with the semi-Gothic architecture of the lofty chambers. Poor Sparks must have been doubly mortified; for not only did he find his old eyesore converted into an irremediable evil by the restoration of the hall, but the supremacy hitherto maintained in the neighbourhood by the modern elegance of his house and establishment, was thrown into the shade by the rich and tasteful arrangements of the hall.

From the contracted look of his forehead, and sudden alteration of his appearance, I have reason to think he was beginning to undergo all the moral martyrdom sustained for thirty years past by the unfortunate Sir Laurence Altham; and were I not by nature the most contented of men, it would have sufficiently reconciled me to the mediocrity of my fortunes, to see that these two great people of my neighbourhood,—the nobly descended Baronet and rich *parvenu*,—were miserable men; that so long as I could remember, one or the other of them had been given over to surliness and discontent.

Before the close of the year, the grand old hall had become one of the noblest seats in the county. There was talk about it in all the country round, and even the newspapers took notice of its renovation, and of General Stanley's removal thither from Stanley Manor. Many people, of the species who love to detect spots in the sun, were careful to point out the insufficiency of the estate, as at present constituted, to maintain so fine a house.

But, after all, what mattered this to General Stanley, who had a fine rent roll elsewhere ?—

The first thing he did, on taking possession, was to give a grand ball to the neighbourhood ; nor was it till the whole house was lighted up for this festive occasion, that people were fully aware of the grandeur of its proportions. He was good enough to send me an invitation on so especial an occasion. But already I had imbibed the distaste which has pursued me through life for what is called society ; and I accordingly contented myself with surveying from a distance, the fine effect produced by the light streaming from the multitude of windows, and exhibiting to the whole country round the gorgeous nature of the decorations within. To own the truth, I could scarcely forbear regretting as I surveyed them, the gloomy dilapidation of the venerable mansion. This modernized antiquity was a very different thing from the massy grandeur of its neglected years ; and I am afraid I loved the old house better with the weeds springing from its crevices, than with all

this carving and gilding, this ebony, and ivory, and light.

The people of Lexley imagined that nothing would induce the Sparks family to be seen under General Stanley's roof. But we were mistaken. So much the contrary, that the squire of Lexley Park made a particular point of being the first and latest of the guests;—not only because his reconciliation with his new neighbour was so recent, but from not choosing to authenticate, by his absence, the rumours of his grievous disappointment.

For all the good he was likely to derive from his visit, the poor man had better have stayed away; for that unlucky night laid foundations of evil for him and his, greater than any he had incurred from the animosity of Sir Laurence. Nay, when in the sequel these results became matter of public commentation, superstitious people were not wanting to hint that the evil spirit traditionally said to haunt one of the wings of the old manor, and to have manifested itself on more than one occasion to members of

the Altham family, (and more especially to the late worthless proprietor of the hall,) had acquired a fatal power over the two supplanters of the ruined family, the moment they crossed the threshold!—

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL Stanley, after marrying late in life, had been some years a widower;—a widower with two daughters, his co-heiresses. The elder of these young ladies was a hopeless invalid, slightly deformed, and so little attractive in person, or desirous to attract, that there was every prospect of the noble fortune of the General centering in her sister. Yet this sister, this girl, had little need of such an accession to her charms; for she was one of those fortunate beings endowed not only with beauty and excellence, but a power of pleasing not always united with even a combination of merit and loveliness.

Every body agreed that Mary Stanley was charming. Old and young, rich and poor,

all loved her, all delighted in her. It is true, the good rector's maiden sisters privately hinted to me their horror of the recklessness with which—sometimes with her sister, oftener without, but wholly unattended,—she drove her little pony-chaise through the village; laughing like a madcap at the pranks of a huge Newfoundland dog, named Serjeant, the favourite of General Stanley, which, while escorting the young ladies, used to gambol into the cottages, upset furniture and children, and scamper out again amid a general uproar. For though Miss Mary was but sixteen, the starched spinsters decided that she was much too old for such folly; and that, if the General intended to present her at court, it was high time for her to lay aside the hoyden manners of childhood.

But, as every one argued against them, why should this joyous, bright, and beautiful creature lay aside what became her so strangely? Mary Stanley was not made for the formalities of what is called high-breeding. Her light, easy, sinuous figure, did not lend itself to the rigid deportment of a prude; and her gay laughing

eyes, and dimpled mouth, were ill calculated to grace a dignified position. The long ringlets of her profuse auburn hair were always out of order;—either streaming in the wind, or straying over her white shoulders;—her long lashes and beautifully defined eyebrows of the same rich tint, alone preserving any thing like uniformity;—a uniformity which, combined with her almost Grecian regularity of features, gave her, on the rare occasions when her countenance and figure were at rest, the air of some nymph or dryad of ancient sculpture. But to compare Mary Stanley to any thing of marble, is strangely out of place; for her real beauty consisted in the ever-varying play of her features, and a certain impetuosity of movement, that would have been a little characteristic of the romp, but that it was restrained by the spell of feminine sensibility. Heart was evidently the impulse of every look and every gesture.

For a man of my years, methinks I am writing like a lover. And so I was! From the first moment I saw that girl, at an humble unaspiring distance, I could dream of nothing

else. Every thing and every body seemed fascinated by Mary Stanley. When she walked out into the fields with the General, her two hands clasping, like those of a child, her father's arm, his favourite colts used to come neighing playfully towards them; and not the fiercest dog of his extensive kennel but, even when unmanageable by the keeper, would creep fawning to her feet.

It was strange enough, but still more fortunate, that all the adoration lavished upon this lovely creature by gentle and simple, Christian and brute, provoked no apparent jealousy on the part of her elder sister. Selina Stanley was afflicted with a cold, reserved, unhappy countenance, only too completely in unison with her disastrous position. But her heart was perhaps as genuine as her face was forbidding; for she loved the merry, laughing, handsome Mary, more as a mother her child, than as a sister nearly of her own years—that is, exultingly, but anxiously. Every one else foresaw nothing but prosperity, and joy, and love, in store for Mary. Selina prayed that it might prove

so ;—but she prayed with tears in her eyes, and trembling in her soul ! For when are the destinies of persons thus exquisitely organized,—thus full of love and loveliness,—thus readily swayed to joy or sorrow by the trivial incidents of life,—characterised by what the world calls happiness ?—such happiness, I mean, as is enjoyed by the serene and prudent, the unexcitable, the unaspiring. Miss Stanley foresaw only too truly, that the best days likely to be enjoyed by her sister, were those she was spending under her father's roof ;—a general idol,—an object of deference and delight to all around !—

At the General's housewarming, though not previously introduced into society, Mary was the queen of the ball ; and all present agreed, that one of the most pleasing circumstances of the evening was to watch the animated cordiality with which she flew from one to the other of those old neighbours of Stanley Manor, (whom she alone had managed to persuade that a dozen miles was no distance to prevent their accepting her father's invitation) ; and not the

most brilliant of her young friends received a more eager welcome, or more sustained attention throughout the evening, than the few homely elderly people, (such as my friends the Whittinghams), who happened to share the hospitality of General Stanley. I dare say that even *I*, had I found courage to accept his invitation, should have received from the young beauty some gentle word, in addition to the kindly smiles with which she was sure to return my respectful obeisance whenever we met accidentally in the village.

Mary was dressed in white, with a few natural flowers in her hair; which, owing to the impetuosity of her movements, soon fell out, leaving only a stray leaf or two, that would have looked ridiculous any where but among her rich, but dishevelled locks; and the pleasant anxieties of the evening imparted such a glow to her usually somewhat pale complexion, that her beauty is said to have been, that night, almost supernatural. She was more like the creature of a dream, than one of those wooden puppets, who move mechanically through the world

under the name of well brought-up young ladies.

It will easily be conceived how much this ball, so rare an event in our quiet neighbourhood, was discussed, not only the following day, but for days and weeks to come. Even at the rectory I heard of nothing else; while by my good old housekeeper, who had a son in service at General Stanley's and a daughter waiting-maid to Miss Sparks, I was let in to secrets concerning it of which even the rectory knew nothing.

In the first place, though Mr. Sparks had peremptorily signified from the first to his family, his desire that all should accompany him to Lexley Hall on this trying occasion, (and it was only natural he should wish to solace his wounded pride, by appearing before his noble neighbour surrounded by his handsome progeny), two of his children had risen up in rebellion against the decree;—and for the first time,—for Sparks was happy in a dutiful and well-ordered family. But the youngest daughter, Kezia, a girl of high spirit and

intelligence, who fancied she had been pointedly slighted by the Misses Stanley, when, in one of Mary's harum-scarum expeditions on her Shetland pony, she had passed, without recognition, the better-mounted young lady of Lexley Park; and the eldest son, who so positively refused to accompany his father to the house of a man by whom Mr. Sparks had inconsiderately represented himself as aggrieved, that for once, the kind parent was forced to play the tyrant, and insist on his obedience.

It was, accordingly, with a very ill grace that these two, the prettiest of the daughters and by far the handsomest of three handsome sons, made their appearance at the *fête*.—But no sooner were they welcomed by General Stanley and his daughters, than the brother and sister, who had mutually encouraged each other's disdain, hastened to recant their opinions.

“How could you, dearest father, describe this courteous, high-bred old gentleman, as insolent and overbearing?”—whispered Kezia.

“How could you possibly suppose that yon-

der lovely, gracious creature, intended to treat you with impertinence?"—was the rejoinder of her brother ; and already the Stanleys had two enemies the less among their neighbours at Lexley Park.

On the other hand, the General had been forced to have recourse to severe schooling to bring his daughters to a sense of what was due to *his guests*, as regarded the family of a man who was known to have spoken disparagingly of them all. Moreover, if the truth must be owned, Mary was not altogether free from the prejudices of her caste ; and, proud of her father's noble extraction, was apt to pout her pretty lip on mention of "the people at Lexley Park ;" for the General, who had no secrets from his girls, had foolishly permitted them to see certain letters addressed to him by the eccentric Sir Laurence Altham, justifying himself concerning the peculiar clause introduced into his deeds of conveyance of his Hall estate, on the grounds of the degraded origin of "the upstart" he was so malignantly intent on discomposing.

“They will spoil our ball, dear papa,—I *know* these vulgar people will completely spoil our ball!” said she. “I think I hear them announced :—‘Mr. Jonas Sparks, Miss Basiliza and Miss Kezia Sparks!’—What names !”

“The parents of Mr. Sparks were dissenters,” observed the General, trying to look severe. “Dissenters are apt to hold to Scriptural names. But *name* is not *nature*, Mary ; and, to judge by appearance, this man’s—this gentleman’s—this Mr. Sparks’s daughters, have every qualification to be an ornament to society.”

“With all my heart, papa ; but I wish it were not ours !” cried the wayward girl. “On the present occasion, especially, I could spare such an accession to our circle ; for I know that Mr. Sparks has presumed to speak of——”

She was interrupted by a sterner reproof on the part of the General than he had ever before administered to his favourite daughter ; and the consequence of this unusual severity was the distinguished reception bestowed, both by Selina and her sister, on the family from Lexley Park.

Next day, however, General Stanley found a totally different cause for rebuke in the conduct of his dear Mary.

“You talked to nobody last night, but those Sparks’s!” said he. “Lord Dudley informed me he had asked you to dance three times in vain: and Lord Robert Stanley assured me *he* could scarcely get a civil answer from you!—Yet you found time, Mary, to dance twice in the course of the evening with that son of Sparks’s!”—

“That son of Sparks’s, as you so despisngly call him, dearest papa, is a most charming partner; while Lord Dudley, and my cousin Robert, are little better than boors. Everard Sparks can talk and dance, as well as *they* ride across a country. Not but what he, too, passes for a tolerable sportsman. And do you know, papa, Mr. Sparks is thinking seriously of setting up a pack of harriers at Lexley?”—

“At Lexley *Park*!” insisted her father, who chose to enforce the distinction instituted by Sir Laurence Altham. “I fancy he will have to ask my permission first. My land lies some-

what inconveniently, in case I choose to oppose his intentions."

"But you won't oppose them!—No, no, dear papa, you sha'n't oppose them!"—cried Mary Stanley, throwing her arms coaxingly round her father's neck, and imprinting a kiss on his venerable forehead. "*Why* should we go on opposing and opposing, when it would be so much happier for all of us to live together as friends and neighbours?"

The General surveyed her in silence for some moments, as she looked up lovingly into his face; then gravely, and in silence, unclasped her arms from his neck. For the first time, he had gazed upon his favourite child without discerning beauty in her countenance, or finding favour for her supplications.

"*My* opinion of Mr. Sparks and his family is not altered since yesterday!" said he coldly, perceiving that she was about to renew her overtures for a pacification. "Your father's prejudices, Mary, are seldom so slightly grounded, that the adulation of a few gross compliments, such as were paid you last night by Mr. Everard

Sparks, may suffice for their obliteration. For the future, remember the less I hear of Lexley Park the better. In a few weeks, we shall be in London; where our sphere is sufficiently removed, I am happy to say, from that of Mr. Jonas Sparks, to secure me against the annoyance of familiarity with him or his."

The partiality of his darling Mary for the handsomest and most agreeable young man who had ever sought to make himself agreeable to her, had sufficed to turn the arguments of General Stanley as decidedly *against* his *parvenu* neighbours, as, two days before, his eloquence had been exercised in their defence.

And now, commenced between the young people and their parents one of those covert warfares, certain to arise from similar interdictions. Mr. Sparks,—satisfied that he should have further insults to endure on the part of General Stanley, in the event of his son pretending to the hand of the proud old man's daughter,—sought a serious explanation with Everard, on finding that he neglected no opportunity of meeting Mary Stanley in her drives,

and walks, and errands of village benevolence ; and by the remonstrances of one father, and peremptoriness of the other, the young couple were soon tempted to seek comfort in mutual confidences. Residing almost within view of each other, there was no great difficulty in finding occasion for an interview. They met, moreover, naturally, and without effort, in all the country houses in the neighbourhood ; and so frequently, that I often wondered they should consider it worth while to hazard the General's displeasure by snatching a few moments' conversation, every now and then, among the old thorns by the water-side, just where the bend of the river secured them from observation ; or in the green lane leading from Lexley Park to my farm, while Miss Stanley took charge of the pony-chaise during the hasty explanations of the imprudent couple. Having little to occupy my leisure during the intervals of my agricultural pursuits, I was constantly running against them, with my gun on my shoulder, or fishing-rod in my hand. I almost feared young Sparks might imagine that I was em-

ployed by the General as a spy upon their movements; so fierce a glance did he direct towards me one day when I was unlucky enough to vault over a hedge within a few yards of the spot where they were standing together—Miss Mary sobbing like a child. But, God knows! he was mistaken if he thought I was taking unfair heed of their proceedings, or likely to gossip indiscreetly concerning what fell accidentally under my notice.

Not that a single soul in the neighbourhood approved General Stanley's opposition to the attachment. On the contrary, from the moment of the liking between the young people becoming apparent, the whole country decided that there could not be a more propitious mode of reuniting the dismembered Lexley estates; for though the General was expressly debarred from selling Lexley Hall to Sparks or his heirs, he could not be prevented bequeathing it to his daughter,—the heirs of Jonas Sparks being the children of her body. And thus, all objections would have been remedied.

But such was not the proud old man's view

of the case. He had set his heart on perpetuating his own name in his family. He had set his heart on the union of his dear Mary with her cousin Lord Robert Stanley ; and Everard Sparks might have been twice the handsome, manly young fellow he was,—twice the gentleman, and twice the scholar,—it would have pleaded little in his favour against the predetermined projects of the positive General. There was certainly some excuse for his ambition on Miss Mary's account. Beauty, merit, fortune, connexion, every advantage was hers, calculated to do honour to a noble alliance; and as her father often exclaimed, with a bitter sneer, in answer to the mild pleadings of Selina, —“ Such a girl as that—a girl born to be a duchess—to sacrifice herself to the son of a Congleton manufacturer !”

Two years did the struggle continue ;—during the greater part of which I was a constant eye-witness of the sorrows which so sobered the impetuous deportment of the light-hearted Mary Stanley. Her father took her to London, with the project of separation he had haughtily

announced ; but only to find, to his amazement, that Eton and Oxford had placed the son of Mr. Sparks of Lexley Park, a member of Parliament, on as good a footing as himself in nearly all the circles he frequented. Even when, in the desperation of his fears, he removed his family to the Continent, the young lover (as became the lover of so endearing and attractive a creature), followed her, at a distance, from place to place. At length, one angry day, the General provoked him to a duel. But Everard would not lift his hand against the father of his beloved Mary. An insult from General Stanley was not as an offence from another. The only revenge taken by the high-spirited young man, was to urge the ungenerous conduct of the father as an argument with the daughter, to put an end, by an elopement, to a state of things too painful to be borne. After much hesitation, it seems, she most unhappily complied. They were married—at Naples I think, or Turin, or some other city of Italy, where we have a diplomatic resident ; and after their marriage,—poor, foolish young people !—

went touring it about gaily in the Archipelago and Levant, waiting a favourable moment to propose a reconciliation with their respective fathers.—As if the wrath and malediction of parents was so mere a trifle to deal with.

The first step taken by General Stanley, on learning the ungrateful rebellion of his favourite child, was to return to England. He seemed to want to be at home again, the better to enjoy and cultivate his abhorrence of every thing bearing the despised name of Sparks; for now began the genuine hatred between the families. Nothing would satisfy the obstinate old soldier, but that the elder Sparks had, from the first, secretly encouraged the views of his son upon the heiress of Lexley Hall; while Mr. Sparks naturally resented with enraged spirit the overbearing tone assumed by his aristocratic neighbour towards those so nearly his equals. Every day produced some new grounds for offence; and never had Sir Laurence Altham, in the extremity of his poverty, regarded the thriving mansion in the valley with half the loathing which the view of Lexley Park produced in the

mind of General Stanley. He was even at the trouble of trenching a plantation on the brow of the hill, with the intention of shutting out the detested object. But trees do not grow so hastily as antipathies; and the General had to endure the certainty, that, for the remainder of *his* life at least, that beautiful domain must be unrolled, map-like, at his feet. Nor is it to be supposed that the battlements of the old hall found greater favour in the sight of the *parvenu* squire, than when in Sir Laurence's time the very sight of them was wormwood to his soul.

Unhappily, while the Congleton manufacturer contented himself with angry words, the gentleman of thirty descents betook himself to action. General Stanley swore to be mightily revenged,—and he was so.

On the very day following his return to England, before he even visited his desolate country-house, he sent for Lord Robert Stanley, and made him the confidant of his indignation;—avowed his former good intentions in his favour—betrayed all Mary's—all *Mrs. Everard Sparks's* disparaging opposition; and ended by

inquiring whether, since whichever of his daughters became Lady Robert Stanley would become sole heiress to his property, his Lordship could make up his mind to accept Selina as a wife? Proud as he was, the General almost condescended to plead the cause of his deformed daughter; enlarging upon her excellencies of character, and, still more, upon her aversion to society, which would secure the self-love of her husband against any public remarks on her want of personal attractions.

Alas! all these arguments were thoroughly thrown away. Lord Robert was, as his cousin Mary had truly described him, little better than a boor. But he was also a spendthrift and a libertine; and had Miss Stanley been as deformed in mind as she was in person, he would have joyfully taken to wife the heiress of ten thousand a-year, and two of the finest seats in the county of Chester.

To herself, meanwhile, no hint of these family negotiations was vouchsafed; and Selina Stanley had every reason to suppose,—when her cousin became on a sudden an assiduous visitor at the

house, and very shortly a declared lover, that their intimacy from childhood having accustomed his eye to her want of personal charms, she had become endeared to him by her mild and submissive temper. So little was she aware of her father's testamentary dispositions in her favour, that the interested nature of Lord Robert's views did not occur to her mind; and, little accustomed to protestations of attachment, Selina's heart was not *very* difficult to soften towards the only man who had ever pretended to love her, and whose apparent attachment promised some consolation for the loss of her sister's society, as well as the chance of re-union with one whom her father had sworn should never, under any possible circumstances, again cross his threshold.

Six months after General Stanley's pride had been wounded to the quick by the newspaper account of a marriage between his favourite child and "a man of the name of Sparks," balm was poured into the wound by another and more pompous paragraph, announcing the union, by special license, of The Right Hon. Lord Robert

Stanley, and the eldest daughter and heiress of Lieut.-Gen. Stanley, of Stanley Manor, only son of the late Lord Henry Stanley, followed by the usual list of noble relatives gracing the ceremony with their presence, and a flourishing account of the departure of the happy couple, in a travelling carriage and four, for their seat in Cheshire.

This announcement, by the way, probably served to convey the intelligence to Mr. and Mrs. Everard Sparks; for the General having carefully intercepted every letter addressed by Mary to her sister, Lady Robert had not the slightest idea in what direction to communicate with one who possessed an undiminished share in her affections.

On General Stanley's arrival in Cheshire, at the close of the honeymoon, the most casual observer might have noticed the alteration which had taken place in his appearance. Instead of the sadness I had expected to find in his countenance after so severe a stroke as the disobedience of his darling girl, I never saw him so exulting. Yet his smiles were not smiles of good-humour. There was bitterness at the

bottom of every word he uttered ; and a terrible sound of menace rang in his unnatural laughter. The consciousness seemed not a moment absent from his mind, that he had defeated the calculations of the designing family ; that he had distanced them ; that he was triumphing over them.—Alas ! none at present entertained the smallest suspicion to what extent !—

Preparatory to the settlements made by the General on Lord and Lady Robert Stanley, it had been found necessary to place in the hands of his Lordship's solicitors the deeds of the Lexley Hall estate ; when, lo ! to the consternation of all parties, it appeared that the General's title was an unsound one ; that by the general terms of this ancient property, rights of heirship could only be evaded by the payment of a certain fine, after intimation of sale in a certain form to the nearest-of-kin of the heir in possession, which form had been overlooked or wantonly neglected by Sir Laurence Altham !

The discovery was indeed embarrassing. Fortunately, however, the sum of ten thousand pounds only had been paid by the General to

satisfy the immediate needs of the unthrifty Baronet ; the remainder of the purchase-money having been left in the form of mortgage on the property. There was consequently the less difficulty, though considerable expense, in cancelling the existing deeds, going through the necessary forms, and, after paying the forfeiture to the heir, (to whom the very existence of his claims was unknown), renewing the contract with Sir Laurence ; to whom, so considerable a sum being still owing, it was as essential as to General Stanley that the covenant should be completed without delay. But all this occurred at so critical a moment, that the General had ample cause to be thankful for the promptitude with which he decided Selina's marriage ; for only four days after the signature of the new deeds, Sir Laurence concluded his ill-spent life ;—his death being, it was thought, accelerated by the excitement consequent on this strange discovery, and the investigations on the part of the heir to which it was giving rise.

For the clause in the original grant of the Lexley estate (which dated from the Reformation)

affected the property purchased by Jonas Sparks as fully as that which had been assigned to the General; and the Baronet being now deceased, there was no possibility of co-operation in rectifying the fatal error. It was more than probable, therefore, that Lexley Park, with all its improvements, was now the property of John Julius Altham, Esq. !—the only dilemma still to be decided by law, being the extent to which, his kinsman having died insolvent and intestate, he was liable to the suit of Jonas Sparks for the return of the purchase money, amounting to £145,000.

Already the fatal intelligence had been communicated by the attorneys of John Julius Altham to those of the astonished man, who, though still convinced of the goodness of his cause, (which, on the strength of certain various statutes affecting such a case, he was advised to contest to the utmost), foresaw a long, vexatious, and expensive lawsuit, that would certainly last his life, and prevent the possibility of one moment's enjoyment of the estate, from which he had received the usual notice of ejection.

Fortunately for him, the present Mr. Altham was not only a gentleman, and disposed to exercise his rights in the most decorous manner; but, of course, unbiassed by the personal prejudices so strongly felt by Sir Laurence, and so unfairly communicated by him to the General. Still, the question was proceeding at the snail's pace rate of Chancery suits at the commencement of the present century, and the unfortunate Congleton manufacturer had every reason to curse the day when he had become enamoured of the grassy glades and rich woodlands of Lexley; seeing that, at the close of an honourable and well-spent life, he was uncertain whether the sons and daughters to whom he had laboured to bequeath a handsome independence, might not be reduced to utter destitution.

CHAPTER IV.

SUCH was the intelligence that saluted the ill-starred Mary and her husband on their return to England !—Instead of the brilliant prospects in which she had been nurtured, disinheritance met her on the one side, and ruin on the other !

Her vindictive father had even made it a condition of his bounties to Lord and Lady Robert, that all intercourse should cease between them and their sister ; a condition which the former, in revenge for the early slights of his fairer cousin, took care should be punctually obeyed by his wife.

Till the event of the trial, Mr. Sparks retained, of course, possession of the Park ; but so bitter was the mortification of the family on discovering in the village precisely the same un-

grateful feeling which had so embittered the soul of Sir Laurence, that they preferred remaining in London, where no one has leisure to dwell upon the mischances of his neighbours, and where sympathy is as little expected as conceded. But when Mary arrived—*poor* Mary! who had now the prospect of becoming a mother, and who, though affectionately beloved by her husband's family, saw they regarded her as the innocent origin of their present reverses,—she soon persuaded her husband to accompany her to her old haunts.

“Do not imagine, dearest,” said she, “that I have any project of debasing you and myself, by intruding into my father's presence. Had we been still prosperous, Everard, I would have gone to him,—knelt to him,—prayed to him,—wept to him,—so earnestly, that his forgiveness could not have been long withheld from the child he loved so dearly. I would have described to him all you are to me,—all your indulgence—all your devotion;—and *you*, too, my own husband, would have been forgiven. But as it is, believe me, I have too proud a sense

of what is due to ourselves, to combat the unnatural hostility in which my sister and her husband appear to take their share. O Everard! to think of Selina becoming the wife of that coarse and heartless man, of whom, in former times, she thought even more contemptuously than I; and who, with his dissolute habits, can only have made my poor afflicted sister his wife from the most mercenary motives! I dread to think of what may be her fate hereafter, when, having obtained at my father's death, all the advantages to which he looks forward, he will show himself in his true colours."

Thus, even with such terrible prospects awaiting herself, the good, generous Mary trembled only to contemplate those of her regardless sister; and it was chiefly for the delight of revisiting the spots where they had played together in childhood—the fondly-remembered environs of Stanley Manor,—that she persuaded her husband to take up his abode in the deserted mansion at the Park, where, from prudential motives, Mr. Sparks had broken up his establishment, and sold off his horses.

Attended by a single servant, in addition to the old porter and his wife who were in charge of the house, Mary trusted that their arrival at Lexley would be unnoticed in the neighbourhood. Confining herself strictly within the boundaries of the Park, which neither her father nor the bride and bridegroom were likely to enter, she conceived that she might enjoy, on her husband's arm, those solitary rambles of which every day circumscribed the extent; without affording reason to the General to suppose, when, discerning from his lofty terraces the mansion of his falling enemy, that, in place of the man he loathed, it contained his discarded child.

The dispirited young woman, on the other hand, delighted in contemplating from the windows of her dressing-room the towers beneath whose shelter she had abided in such perfect happiness with her doating father and apparently attached sister. They loved her no longer, it is true. Perhaps it was her fault,—(she would not allow herself to conceive it could be a fault of *theirs* !) But at all events she loved

them dearly as ever; and it was comforting to her poor heart to catch a glimpse of their habitation, and know herself within reach, should sickness or evil betide.

“ If I should not survive my approaching trial,” thought Mary, after surveying for hours, through her tears, the heights of Lexley Hall, and fancying she could discern human figures moving from window to window, or from terrace to terrace; “ if I should be fated never to behold this child, already loved,—this child which is to be so dear a blessing to us both,—in my last hour my father would not surely refuse to give me his blessing!—Nor would Selina persist in her present cruel alienation.—It is, indeed, a comfort to be here.”

Her husband thought otherwise. To him, nothing was more trying than this compulsory sojourn at Lexley; not that he required other society than that of his engaging and attached wife. At any other moment, it would have been delightful to him to enjoy the country pleasures around them, with no officious intrusive world to interpose between their affection. But in

his present uncertainty as to his future prospects, to be mocked by this empty show of proprietorship, and have constantly before his eyes the residence of the man who had heaped such contumely on his head and inflicted such pain on the gentlest and sweetest of human hearts, was a state of moral torment.

In the course of my fishing excursions,—(for, thanks to Mr. Sparks's neighbourly liberality, I had a card of general access to his park)—I frequently met the young couple; and having no clue to their secret sentiments, noticed with deep regret the sadness of Mary's countenance, and the sinister looks of her husband. I feared—I greatly feared—that they were not happy together. The General's daughter repined, perhaps, after her former fortunes. The young husband sighed, doubtless, over the liberty he had renounced.

It was spring time; and Lord Robert having satisfied his cravings after the pleasures of London, by occasional bachelor visits on pretence of business, the family were to remain at the hall till after the Easter holidays; so that

Mary had every expectation of the accomplishment of her hopes previous to their departure. Perhaps, in the secrecy of her heart, she flattered herself that, on hearing of her safety, her obdurate relations might be moved, by a sudden burst of pity and kindness, to make overtures of reconciliation—at all events to despatch words of courteous inquiry. For she was ever dwelling on her good fortune that her father should, on this particular year, have so retarded the usual period of his departure. Yet when the report of these exulting exclamations on her part reached my ear, I was ungenerous enough to attribute them to a very different origin; fancying that the poor submissive creature was thankful for being within reach of protection from conjugal misusage!—

Meanwhile, she was so far justified in one portion of her surmises, that no tidings of her residence at Lexley Park had as yet reached the ear of her father. The fact was, that not a soul had courage to do so much as mention, in his presence, the name of his once idolized child; and Lord Robert, having been apprized

of the circumstance, instantly exacted a promise from his wife, that nothing should induce her to hazard her father's displeasure, by communication with her sister or acquainting the General of the arrival of the offending pair. The consequence was, that in the dread of encountering her sister, (whom she felt ashamed to meet as the wife of the man they had so often decried together), Lady Robert rarely quitted the house ; and these two sisters, so long the affectionate inmates of the same chamber,—these sisters who had wept together over their mother's death-bed,—abided within sight of each other's windows, yet estranged as with the estrangement of strangers !—

And then, we pretend to talk with horror of the family feuds of southern nations ; and, priding ourselves on our calm and passionless nature, feel convinced that all the domestic virtues extant on earth, have taken refuge in the British empire !—

Every day, meanwhile, I noticed that the handsome countenance of Everard Sparks grew gloomier and gloomier : and how was I to know

that every day he received letters from his father, announcing the unfavourable aspect of their suit; and that (owing, as was supposed, to the suggestions of General Stanley's solicitors) even the conduct of the adverse party was becoming offensive. The elder Sparks wrote like a man overwhelmed with mortification, and stung by a sense of undeserved injury; and his appeals to the sympathy and support of his son, were such as to place the spirited young man in a most painful predicament as regarded the family of his wife.

Unwilling to utter in her presence an injurious word concerning those who, persecute her as they might, were still her nearest and dearest by the indissoluble ties of nature, all he could do, in relief to his overcharged feelings, was to rush forth into the Park, and curse the day that he was born to behold all he loved in the world overwhelmed in one common ruin.

On such occasions, while pretending to fix my attention on my float upon the river, I often watched him from afar, till I was terrified by the frantic vehemence of his gestures. There

was almost reason to fancy that the evil influences of the old hall were extending their power over the valley; and that this distracted young man was falling into the eccentricities of Sir Laurence Altham.

After viewing with anxiety the wild deportment of poor Mary's husband, I happened one day to pass along the lane I have described as skirting the garden of the manor-house, on my way homewards to my farm; and on plunging my eyes, as usual, into the verdant depths of the clipped yew-walks visible through the iron-palisades, was struck by the contrast afforded to the scene I had just witnessed; not only by its aristocratic tranquillity, but by the grave and subdued deportment of Lady Robert Stanley, who was sauntering in one of the alleys, accompanied by a favourite dog I had often seen following her sister in former days. She looked the very picture of contented egotism.

I almost longed to call aloud to her, and confide all I knew and all I supposed.—But what right had I to create alarms in her sister's behalf?—What right had I to incite her to

disobedience against the father on whom she and her husband were dependent? Better leave things as they were;—the common philosophy of selfish, timid people, afraid of exposing their own heads to a portion of the storm their interference may chance to bring down, while assisting the cause of the weak against the strong.

I used often to go home and think of poor Mary, till my heart ached. That young and beautiful creature,—that creature till lately so beloved,—to be thus cruelly abandoned, thus helpless, thus unhappy! Perhaps not a soul sympathizing with her but myself;—an obscure, low-born, uninfluential man, of no more value as a protector than a willow wand shivered from the Lexley plantations! Not so much as the merest trifle in which I could demonstrate my good-will. I thought and thought it over, and there was nothing I could do,—nothing I could offer. When I *did* hit upon some pretext of kindness, I only did amiss. The fruit season was not begun;—nay, the orchards were only in blossom;—and times were over for forcing-houses at Lexley Park. Thinking, therefore, that the

invalid might be pleased with a basket of Jersey pears, of which a very fine kind grew in my orchard, I ventured to send some to her address. But the very next time I encountered Everard in the village, he cast a look at me as if he would have killed me for my officiousness; or, perhaps, for taking the liberty to suppose that Lexley Park was less luxuriously provisioned than in former years. Nor was it till long afterwards I discovered that my old housekeeper (who had taken upon herself to carry my humble offering to the park) had not only seen the poor young lady, but been foolish enough to talk of Lady Robert in a tone which appears to have exercised a cruel influence over her gentle heart; so that, when her husband returned home from rabbit-shooting, an hour afterwards, and found her recovering from a fainting fit, he visited upon me the folly of my servant. Such was the cause of his angry looks.

A few days afterwards, however, he had far more to reproach his conscience withal, than poor Barbara. Having no concealments from his wife, to whom he was in the habit of avowing

every emotion of his heart, he was rash enough to mention having met the travelling carriage of Lord and Lady Robert on the London road. They had quitted the hall ten days previous to the epoch originally fixed for their departure!—

“Gone—exactly gone?—already at two hundred miles’ distance from me?” cried poor Mary, nothing doubting that her father had, as usual, accompanied them; and feeling herself now, for the first time, alone in the dreary seclusion to which she had condemned herself only that she might breathe the same atmosphere with those she loved. “Yet they had certainly decided to remain at the hall till after Easter! Perhaps they discovered my being here, and the discovery hastened their journey. Unhappy creature that I am! to have become thus hateful to those in whose veins my blood is flowing. Everard! Everard! Oh, what have I done that God should thus abandon me?”—

The soothing and affectionate remonstrances addressed to her by her husband, had so far a good effect, that they softened her despair to tears.—Long and unrestrainedly did she weep

upon his shoulder ; trying to comfort him by the assurance that *she* was comforted ; or at least that she would endeavour to *seek* comfort from that protection and goodness whence it had been so often derived.

A few minutes afterwards, having been persuaded by Everard to rest herself on the sofa, to recover the effects of the agitation his indiscreet communication had excited, she suddenly complained of cold, and begged him to close the windows. It was a balmy April day, with a genial sun shining fresh into the room. The air was as the air of midsummer ;—one of those days on which you almost see the small green leaves of spring bursting from their shelly covering, and the resinous buds of the chestnut-trees expanding into maturity. Poor Everard saw at once that the chilliness of which his wife complained, must be the effect of illness. More cautious, however, on this occasion than before, he inquired, as her shivering increased, what preparations she had made for the event which still left her some weeks for exertion. “None !” His sisters had kindly undertaken to supply her

with all she might require ; and the services of the nurse, accustomed to attend his married sister, were engaged on her behalf. At the end of the month, this woman was to arrive at Lexley, bringing with her the wardrobe of the little treasure who was to afford renewed peace and happiness to its mother.

Though careful to conceal his anxiety from his wife, Everard Sparks, disappointed and distressed, quitted the room in haste to send for the medical man who had long been the attendant of his family. But before he arrived, the shivering fit of the poor sufferer had increased to an alarming degree. A calming potion was administered, and orders issued that she should be kept quiet ; but in the consternation created in the little household by the communication, Dr. R— thought it necessary to make of the possibility of a premature confinement, poor Mrs. Sparks's maid, a young inexperienced woman, dispatched a messenger to my house for her old kinswoman ; and it was through Barbara I became acquainted with the melancholy incidents I am about to relate.

The sedatives administered failed in their effect. A fatal shock had been already given ; and while struggling through that direful night with the increasing pangs that verified the doctor's prognostications, the sympathizing women around the sufferer could scarcely restrain their tears at the courage with which she supported her anguish, rejoicing in it, as it were, in the prospect of embracing her child ;—when all present were aware that the compensation was about to be denied her, that the child was already dead. Just as the day dawned, her anxious husband was congratulated on her safety ; and then, the truth could no longer be concealed from Mary. She asked to see her babe. Her husband was employed to persuade her to defer seeing it for an hour or two, “till it was dressed—till she was more composed.” The truth rushed into her mind ; and she uttered not another word, in the apprehension of increasing his disappointment and mortification.

So long did her silence continue, that, trusting she had fallen asleep, old Barbara's grand-daughter entreated poor Everard to withdraw and

leave her to her rest. But the moment he quitted the room, she spoke, resolutely, and in a firmer voice than her previous sufferings had given them reason to suppose possible.

“Now then, let me see my boy!” said she. “I know that he is dead. But do not be afraid of shocking or distressing me. I have courage to look upon the poor little creature for whom I have suffered so much; and who, I trusted, would reward me for all.”

The women remonstrated, as it was their duty to remonstrate. But when they saw that opposition on this point only excited her, dreading an accession of fever, they brought the poor babe, and laid it on the pillow beside its mother. That first embrace, to which she had looked forward with such intensity of delight, folded to her burning bosom only a clay-cold child!—

Even thus, it was fair to look on;—bearing promise in its little form, that its beauty would have equalled that of its handsome parents; and Mary, as she pressed her lips to its icy forehead, fancied she could trace on those tiny features a resemblance to its father. Old Barbara,

perceiving how bitterly the tears of the sufferer were falling on the cheeks of her lost treasure, now interfered. But the mother had still a last request to make. A few downy curls were perceptible on the temples,—in colour and fineness resembling her own. She wished to rescue from the grave this slight remembrance of her poor nameless offspring; and her wish having been complied with, she suffered the babe to be taken from her relaxed and nerveless grasp.

“Leave me the hair,” said she, in a faint voice. “Thanks—thanks! I am happy now—I will try to sleep—I am happy—happy now!”—

She slept—and never woke again. At the close of an hour or two, her anxious husband, finding she had not stirred, gently and silently approached the bedside, and took into his own the fair hand lying on the coverlid, to ascertain whether fever had ensued. *Fever?*—It was already cold with the damps of death!

Imagine, if you can, the agony and self-reproaches of that bereaved man! Again and again did he revile himself as her murderer; accusing

himself—her father—her sister—the whole world. At one moment, he fancied that her condition had not been properly treated by her attendants; at another, that the medical man ought not to have left the house. Nay, hours and hours after she was gone for ever,—after the undertakers had commenced their hideous preparations,—even while she lay stretched before him, white and cold as marble, he persisted that life might be still recalled; and, but for the better discrimination of those around him, would have insisted on attempts at resuscitation, calculated only to disturb, almost sacrilegiously, the sacred peace of the dead!

I was one of the first to learn the heart-rending news of this beloved being's untimely end; for my old woman having asked permission to remain with her through the night, (explaining the exigency of the case), I could not forbear hurrying to the house as soon as it was day, in the hope of hearing she was a happy mother. Somehow or other, I had never contemplated an unfavourable result. The idea of death never presented itself to me in common

with any thing so young and fair ; and as I walked through the park and crossed the bridge, with the white cheerful mansion before me, and the morning sun shining full upon its windows, I thought how gladsome it looked ; but could not forbear feeling that, even with the prospect of losing it, even with the certainty of beggary, Everard, as a husband and father, was the fellow most to be envied upon earth !

I reached the house, and the old man who answered my ring at the office entrance, was speechless from tears. Though usually hard as iron, he sobbed as if his heart would break. I asked to speak with Barbara,—with my house-keeper. He told me I could not,—that she was “ busy laying out the body.” I was answered. That dreadful word told me all.—I had no more questions to ask. I cared not *who* survived, or what became of the survivors. And as I turned sickening away, to bend my steps homewards, I remember wondering how that fair spring morning could shine so bright and auspiciously, when *she* was gone from us. It seemed to triumph in our loss. Alas ! it shone to wel-

come a new angel to the kingdom of our Father who is in heaven !—

Suddenly it struck me, that I, too, had a duty to perform. In that scanty household, there was no one to take thought of the common forms of life ; so I hastened to the rectory, to suggest to our good pastor a visit of consolation to the house of mourning, and acquaint his sisters with its forlorn condition. Like myself, they began exclaiming, “Alas ! alas ! It was but the other day that”——reverting to all the acts of charity and girlish graces of that dear departed Mary Stanley, who had been among us as the shadow of a dream.

Before I left the rectory, Dr. Whittingham had issued his orders ; and lo ! as I proceeded homewards, with a heavy step and heavier heart, the sound of the passing bell from Lexley church pursued me with its measured toll,—till I could scarcely refrain from sitting me down by the wayside, and weeping my very soul away.

On reaching the lane I have so often described as skirting the gardens of the old hall, I noticed, through the palisades, a person, probably one

of the gardeners, sauntering along Lady Robert's favourite yew-walk. No ! on a nearer approach, I saw, and almost shuddered to see, that it was General Stanley himself (who, I fancied, had accompanied his son-in-law to town) taking an early walk, to enjoy the sweetness of that delicious morning.

As I drew nearer, I averted my head. At that moment I had not courage to look him in the face. I could scarcely suppose him ignorant of what had occurred ; and, if aware of the sad event, his obduracy was unmanly to a degree that filled me with disgust. But just as I came opposite the iron gates, he hailed me by name,—more familiarly and courteously than he was wont,—to ask “whether I came from the village, and for whose death they were tolling?”

If worlds had depended on my answer, I could not have uttered a word ! But I conclude that, catching sight of my troubled face and swollen eyelids, the General supposed I had lost some near and dear friend ; for, instead of renewing his question, he merely touched his

hat, and passed on, leaving me to proceed in my turn. But the spectacle of my profound affliction probably excited his curiosity; for I found afterwards, that, instead of pursuing his walk, he returned straight to the house, and addressed the inquiry which had so distressed me, to others having more courage to reveal the fatal truth. I believe it was the old family butler who abruptly answered—"For my poor young lady, General!—for the sweetest angel that ever trod the earth!"

For my part, I wonder the announcement did not strike him to the earth! But he heard it without apparent emotion; like a man who, having already sustained the worst affliction this world can afford, has no sensibility for further trials. Still the intelligence was not ineffective. Without pausing an instant for reflexion, or the indulgence of his feelings, he set forth on foot to Lexley Park. With his hat pulled over his eyes, and a determined air, rather as if about to execute an act of vengeance than offer a tardy tribute of tenderness to his victim, he hurried to the house;—commanded the startled

old servant to show him the way to *her* room,—entered it,—and knelt down beside the bed on which she lay, with her dead infant on her arm, asking her forgiveness and the forgiveness of God, as humbly as though he were not the General Stanley proverbial for pride and implacability.

Old Barbara, who had not quitted the room, assured me it was a heart-breaking sight, to behold that white head bowed down in agony upon the cold feet of his child. For he felt himself unworthy to press her helpless hand to his lips, or remove the cambric from her face; but called, in broken accents, upon the name of “Mary! his child! his darling!” addressing her rather with the fondling terms bestowed upon girlhood, than as a woman—a wife—a mother!

“But a more affecting thing still,” said the old woman, “was to see that Mr. Everard took no more heed of the General’s sudden entrance than though it were a thing to be looked for. He seemed neither to hear his exclamations nor perceive his distress.” Poor gentleman! His

haggard eyes were fixed,—his mind bewildered,—his hopes blasted for ever,—his life a blank.—He neither answered when spoken to, nor even spoke, when the good rector, according to his promise, came to announce that he had dispatched the fatal intelligence by express to his family, beseeching his instructions concerning the steps to be taken for the burial of the dead.

- But why afflict you and myself by recurring to these melancholy details! Suffice it, that this dreadful blow effected what nothing else on earth could have effected in the mind of General Stanley. Humbled to the dust, even the arrival of the once despised owner of Lexley Park did not drive him from the house. He asked his pity,—he asked his pardon. Beside the coffin of his daughter, he expressed all the compunction a generous-hearted and broken-hearted man could express; and all he asked in return, was leave to lay her poor head in the grave of her ancestors.

No one opposed his desire. The young widower had not as much consciousness left

as would have enabled him to utter the negative General Stanley seemed prepared to expect ; and as to his father, about to abandon Lexley for ever, to what purpose erect a family vault in a church which neither he nor his were ever likely to see again ?—

To the chapel at Stanley Manor, accordingly, were the mother and child removed. The General wrote expressly to forbid his son-in-law and Selina returning to the hall on pretence of sustaining him in his affliction. He *chose* to give way to it ; he *chose* to be alone with his despair.

Never shall I forget the day that mournful funeral procession passed through the village ! Young and old came forth weeping to their doors to bid her a last farewell ; even as they used to come and exchange smiles with her, in those happy days when life lay before her, bright—hopeful—without a care—without a responsibility.—I had intended to pay the same respect.—I meant, indeed, to have followed the hearse, at an humble distance, to its final destination. But when I arose that morning, a

sudden weakness came upon me, and I was unable to quit my room. I, so strong, so hardy, who have passed through life without sickness or doctor, was powerless that day as an infant.—

It was from the good rector, therefore, I heard how the General (on whom, in consequence of the precarious condition of the afflicted husband, devolved the task of chief mourner) sustained his courage to perform with dignity and propriety his duty to the dead. As he followed the coffin through the churchyard, crowded by her old pensioners,—many of them praying on their knees as it passed,—his step was as firm and his brow as erect as though at the head of his regiment. It was not till all was over,—the mournful ceremony done, the crowd dispersed, the funeral array departed—that, having descended into the vault ere the stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre, in order to point out the exact spot where he wished her remains to be deposited, so that hereafter his own might rest by her side, he renounced all self-restraint, and throwing him-

self upon the ground, gave himself up to his anguish, and refused to be comforted!

That summer was as dreary a season at Lexley as the dreariest winter! Both the park and the hall were shut up; nor did General Stanley ever again resume his tenancy of the old manor. When the result of the Chancery suit left Mr. Altham in possession of the former estate, the General literally preferred giving up the moiety of the purchase-money he had paid, and leaving the place to be re-united with the property, which the rigour of the law thus singularly restored to the last heirs of the Althams; and such was the cause of my neighbour, the present Sir Julius Altham, regaining possession of the hall.

It was not for many years, however, that the cause was ultimately decided. There was an appeal against the Chancellor's decree; and even after the decree was confirmed, came an endless number of legal forms, which so procrastinated the settlement, that not only the original unfortunate purchaser, but poor Everard himself, was in his grave when the

mansion in which they had so prided themselves was pulled down, and all trace of their occupancy effaced.

I sometimes ask myself, indeed, whether the whole of this "strange eventful history," with which the earliest feelings of my heart were painfully interwoven, really occurred; whether the manor ever passed for a time out of the possession of the ancient house of Altham; whether the domain, now one and indivisible, were literally partitioned off,—a park paling interposing only between the patrician and plebeian. Often, after spending hour after hour by the river side, when the fly is on the water and the old thorns in bloom, I recur to the first day I came back into Lexley Park after the funeral had passed through, and recollect the soreness of heart with which I lifted my eyes towards the house, of which every trace has since disappeared. At that moment there seemed to rise before me, sporting among the gnarled branches of the old thorn-trees, the graceful form of Mary Stanley, followed by old Serjeant bounding and barking through the fern; and

the General looking on from a distance, pretending to be angry, and desiring her to come out of the covert and not disturb the game. Exactly thus, and there, I beheld them for the first time!—What would I not give to realize once more, if only for a day, that happy, happy vision!—

Stanley Manor is let to strangers during the minority of Lord Robert's sickly son; the father being an absentee, the mother in an early grave. She lived long enough, however, to be a repining wife; and my neighbour, Sir Julius Altham, has more than once hinted to me that, of the whole family, the portion of Selina most deserved compassion.

THE CHILDLESS MOTHER.'

CHAPTER I.

THE present aspect of the cities of Belgium supplies almost as interesting an annotation to our historical records of the Middle Ages, as the ruins of the Coliseum and Capitol afford to the more majestic annals of the Roman Empire; and so subsidiary has been, for centuries past, the existence of the Netherlands, that but for the quaint splendour of Bruges, Ghent, and other obsolete capitals of the Low Countries, we should find it hard to credit that the flower of European chivalry once concentrated itself among those gloomy flats of Western Flanders, which, to unaccustomed eyes, appear at best a well-cultivated swamp. That the order of the Golden Fleece, still so memorably honoured by the aristocracies of Europe, should have

originated in a district thus unambitious and obscure, would appear incredible, but for the gorgeous tombs bequeathed by the House of Burgundy, its creators, to the cathedral of Bruges; and the curious archives enriching the kingdom which has arisen upon the ruins of the extinguished duchy.

Of the remarkable cities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, still flourishing in the north of Europe, this same capital of Western Flanders is the most curious. Like the House of Bourbon under the schooling of the Revolution, "*elle n'a rien appris, ni rien oublié.*" Rouen, its only rival as regards the importance of her gothic monuments and historical associations, derives from her commercial resources a degree of prosperity and activity, tending to modernize the antique quaintness of the old Norman capital; while Bruges appears to exist in a stagnant atmosphere of humid dulness, endowed with conservative properties of a peculiar kind. The usual wear and tear of life have no influence in a spot so paralysed by inertia. The lazy canals stagnate in their channels;—the unfrequented

streets are voiceless as those of Herculaneum or any other city of the dead. The very air appears less buoyant than elsewhere ; and a moral mildew pervades the whole character of the place.

Extending over a considerable tract of ground, intersected by canals,—(from the numberless bridges over which it derived its name of Brugge, or Bruges,)—the corn-mills supplying the population are perched upon the small embankment surrounding the town under the dignified name of ramparts, as if to catch the breezes from the coast, the only winds of heaven that visit that tranquil spot too roughly. Yet even the sails of the windmills appear to turn more leisurely at Bruges than in any other region deriving its daily bread from similar means and appliances ; and after four-and-twenty hours spent in perambulating the dreary maze of the tortuous streets, unenlivened only by a few gloomy-looking Flemish women, wandering silent and sad under the hoods of their cloaks of black merinos, the stranger expects to find his hair grown greyer as by the lapse of a year or two.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a city more replete with interest for the eye of the historian. Nay, the monuments of Bruges are in many instances as beautiful as they are curious ; and the carved chimney-piece of the old palace, now a public tribunal, is one of the finest and most celebrated specimens extant of the art which England did not learn to prize till (centuries after the execution of this master-piece), from the hand of Gibbons and his pupils.

The venerable mansion in the great square, exhibited to the admiration of travellers as the residence of Charles II. in his boyhood, and the still more curious old house adjoining, the habitation for centuries past from sire to son of a "DIAMANT-ZETTER," or jeweller, who takes pride in preserving the old structure in its original condition, would satisfy the curiosity of the antiquary in any other town than that containing the famous Prinzenhof ; in a portion of which, still standing unchanged and entire, were celebrated the nuptials of Charles of Burgundy with Margaret of York, the sister of Edward IV. Nay, it is recorded on sufficient

authority, that in this singular specimen of the domestic architecture of the middle ages, Edward III. was entertained and lodged, when invited into the Low Countries by the faction of Jacques van Artevelde.

In visiting almost any other city of equal antiquity, involuntary incredulity takes possession of the mind. We examine the monuments of past ages with a sort of grudging faith. But the quaintness of Bruges carries conviction on the very surface. No need to grope into foundations or verify archives, in order to attain perfect faith in the authenticity of its dates. We have not to *revert* to former centuries; they seem to be about us at every turn; nor would it much startle us to behold the grand square filled with pursuivants and pages, with lists set out for one of those princely jousts by which the earlier dukes of Burgundy used to assemble at their court the chivalry of Brabant and Hainault, with princely visitors from all the countries in the world. While leaning over the balcony of the old belfry, we can almost fancy the terrified suite of Mary of Burgundy spurring back to-

wards the palace, from the disastrous hawking party, in the course of which a fall from her palfrey produced the death of one of the fairest princesses and richest heiresses in Europe,—at an age and occupying a position nearly parallel with those of the present sovereign of our own country; nor is it difficult to imagine the young prince, her grandson, (afterwards renowned in history under the name of Charles V.) enjoying in his good city of Bruges those homely pleasures and pastimes, which for a time so absorbed his youthful ambition as most injuriously to delay his departure from the Netherlands for his fairer kingdom of the south.

Some portion of the indelibility of these characteristics is doubtless attributable to the ultracatholic spirit bequeathed to the Belgian provinces by the domination of Spain and Austria. Priestcraft is still in the ascendant; benumbing the faculties and stagnating the industry of the inhabitants. But the dulness and desertion of the city, apparently abandoned by its population, is the natural consequence of subsiding from the capital of a wealthy duchy into a mere pro-

vincial town ; the want of local attraction, and the pernicious influence of the miasma of the neighbouring marshes, having begun to be felt by the Flemings themselves the moment the city ceased to be a seat of government, comprehending the pleasures and profits of a court. After the first gratification of his curiosity, the stranger who visits Bruges is pretty sure to inquire what can have become of the hundred thousand souls wanting to give life and animation to a city of the dead ?

It is not that London itself is devoid of monuments and associations of equal antiquity. But after viewing the ancient effigies of our early sovereigns in Westminster Abbey, we turn from the grave of a Plantagenet to that of Canning, Pitt, or Fox ;—and even from the turrets of Lambeth Palace look out upon the modern manufactories, penitentiaries, and bridges, evincing our progress in national prosperity and social civilization. But from the ancient, damp, and desolate church, created at Bruges a thousand years ago by the Count Adorni, (after two pilgrimages to the Holy Land to secure its fac-

similitude to the chapel of the sepulchre of Christ,) we emerge into a street where the monk still trails his sandal, and the Beguine steals along under her hood ; till we almost expect to meet old Froissart himself,—(a native of these provinces),—ambling upon his canonical mule towards the gates of the Prinzenhof ! Even the occupation of the French, which in almost every other city has left traces of the imperial eagle, and on Brussels itself has conferred a thousand civic benefits of an ineffaceable nature, did nothing to destroy the characteristics of the metropolis of a sovereign who, in the fifteenth century, while England was comparatively a pauper, bequeathed to his successors a personalty valued at three millions of golden crowns !

From such high-sounding words, what a falling off to the obscure insignificance of a provincial town, which even the transit of a railroad has failed to arouse from its leaden slumber ! What a change comes over the spirit of our dream while contemplating the peaked roofs of the old house on the quay of the Brugschen

Canal, inhabited by Gabriel Zoon,—the rich brewer of Bruges, whose brewery and counting houses occupy the adjoining premises of the old convent of the Ursulines ;—the curious gardens of which, surrounded by a lofty wall, connect the house of business with the private residence of the proprietor, a man in his climacteric, or “by'r lady inclining to three-score,” taciturn and undemonstrative, like the generality of Flemings; loving but two things in this sublunary world,—his money and his flowers,—money being the business, and flowers the pleasure of his days.

Yet Gabriel Zoon was happy in an only son,—a fine young man, one of the finest in Bruges,—whom all beside himself delighted to honour,—the apprentices in the brewery no less than his grander fellow-citizens of the town council. But this popularity might be the very cause of the old brewer's harsh and graceless deportment towards him. Old Gabriel might not be altogether pleased to behold the golden opinions of the place so lavished on his son, while *he* remained at hand to claim the share

more grudgingly accorded. Or, like other tyrants, he was perhaps jealous of the heir to whom his ducats and hyacinths, his florins and tulips, his crowns and auriculas, must devolve, when *he* was consigned to his family grave in the church of St. John.

Such, at least, was the view of his churlishness taken by his friends when, instead of keeping Emmanuel in sight, as the only living thing akin to him, or likely to warm the lazy current of his blood, he caused him to be educated at the college of Louvain; and, now that he had attained his twenty-second year and was one of the finest young men in Bruges, to despatch him to Brussels for the completion of his law-studies, with a view to his exercise of that learned profession, instead of the more homely but scarcely less thriving trade of his forefathers. For the Zoons had been busy at the mash-tub for a period of nearly two centuries, in a country where beer is the universal potation:—weak for the poor, to whom the brackish springs of the country convey ague, to the utter discredit of teetotalism; and strong, for such of

the rich as do not prefer strong waters to even Faro and Lembick. The hideous bas-relief over their archway of entrance, the master-piece of some Brugschen carver or sculptor of the seventeenth century, representing a group of wooden-limbed individuals engaged in the various processes of brewing, had witnessed the egress of as many hogsheads of malt liquor from the vats of the Zoons, as would have floated the whole country between the city endykement and the frontier.

Frequent discussions consequently arose between the domino-players and beer-drinkers of the well-frequented cafés of the place, whether it were not a proof of ingratitude on the part of old Gabriel to vary the career of his posterity from the line in which his noble fortune had been amassed ; or of becoming pride, in striving to make a scholar and a gentleman, and probably at some future time a man having authority, of his only son, instead of limiting his ambitions to the superintendence of a brew-house and its plebeian registers. With the usual stolidity of their phlegmatic race, these

worthies usually left upon the field a drawn battle ; protesting, with cautious discernment, that “ time would show ;” that if Emmanuel Zoon came to be a great lawyer, and in process of time a king’s proctor or judge of assize in the public tribunal of the city, they would admit that his father had done wisely in his generation ;—but that if, on the contrary, he came to be only one of the thousand Flemish advocates without cause or client, it would be clear as the glass of faro on the table beside them, that he had better have stuck to the tub. “ No brewer beyond his malt !” was the verdict of Gabriel Zoon’s venerable neighbour, Peter Persyn,—in whose family, hosiery was as much an inheritance as hops in that of the Zoons. “ I feel strongly suspicious that my friend Gabriel will live to repent having left this lad of his to the mere idleness of study.”

For amid the industrious and operative population of Bruges, study passed for leisure ! With them, a book was a pastime for holidays, and learning too resultless a luxury for the work-a-day world ;—and not one of them but regarded

the curer of stockfish or currier of hides as a wiser and better man, than the idle fellow of a librarian in charge of the curious old library wherewith the houses of Burgundy and Austria endowed a city which they could not also endow with a taste for its contents. As in the case of Hungary, a country equally devoid of literature with Belgium, (or rather a country which, like Belgium, has a language for the poor and a language for the rich,—a popular dialect and an aristocratic,)—the race who speak the tongue which no one condescends to write, have little or nothing provided for them to read worth the sacrifice of their lucrative occupations or domestic pleasures. Among such men as Peter Persyn and his illiterate companions, accordingly, the scholarship of Emmanuel Zoon was accounted an offence, till it was able to produce so much per cent. upon the cost expended on his education.

CHAPTER II.

IT was perhaps the arguments of these matter-of-fact neighbours, or it might be the influence of the humid exhalations produced by the old stagnant canal bordering his ancestral premises, which subdued the ambitions of Emmanuel to such remarkable tameness, that, instead of embracing with eagerness the profession proposed to him by his father, with all its administrative benefits and contingencies and the chamber of representatives extending its well-cushioned benches in the distance, he repined after the homely calling of his progenitors! It was evident he felt himself born to be a brewer, as if Providence had adapted the organization of all the Zoons for that unpretending exercise of ingenuity; for as the time

approached to exchange the daily routine of his domestic life for the lawyer's study at Brussels which was to be the drawback upon the pleasures and freedom of his metropolitan existence, he became so sadly out of spirits, that one might have fancied the *genius loci* was exercising the same baneful influence upon his web-footed Flemish nature, as upon the unacclimatized stranger, who is pretty sure to pay, by a fit of ague a-year, his tribute to the genius of the soil.

“If you make your first appearance in the office of Master Vermaeghe with those sallow cheeks and lack-lustre eyes,”—observed his father, one day towards the close of summer, when Emmanuel was good-naturedly sauntering by his side in the Ursuline garden, trusting to gratify his father's pride by admiration of his carnations and double Indian pinks,—“I expect he will write me back that I had better have despatched you to the Hospital of St. John for cure, than to your duties in his office. However, you have time before Michaelmas, when your articles begin, to pluck up strength; and I

strongly recommend you, Emmanuel my boy, instead of shutting yourself up morning, noon, and night in your chamber yonder, the aspect of which is good only to ripen the grapes of the old vine trained round your window, to shake yourself out of your quilt at daybreak, and take a stretch on the St. André road, so as to turn your nose seaward, refresh yourself with the morning breezes, and get an appetite for your noon-morsel. The cup of coffee that serves you at present from dawn till dinner, will never put the strength into you necessary for the chine of a man who must sit over his desk for the next five years, ten hours of the twenty-four."

At the close of this exhortation, far kindlier than the paternal admonitions usually addressed to him by the old brewer, Emmanuel Zoon found it impossible to evade the searching glances suddenly diverted by the old gentleman from his carnation-bed to the face of his son. The consequence was, that the blushes of the future lawyer deepened into a most unprofessional blush; and any man whose ideas were not pre-absorbed by the price current of

the *Emprunt Belge*, or the cut and colour of the petals of a piccotee, must have surmised that the confusion of that honest face was produced by a consciousness more perplexing than the care of his health, or the dread of early rising.

“I vow to mercy that some officious person has disturbed the flower-pots staked over my prize carnations to keep them from the rain during their flowering!”—resumed the old man, pettishly knitting his brows.

“The crimson and straw-coloured one certainly appears to have lost its protection,” carelessly replied his son.

“Crimson and straw-coloured? You talk of such things like some booby errand-boy!” retorted the old man. “Why can’t you learn to say the ‘Duchess of Brabant’ like a man? I am sure you dawdle away hours enough in this garden, to have learned something of flowers by this time;—yet ’tis my sworn belief you don’t know an anemone from a ranunculus!”

“Wiser men than myself have been puzzled

by such distinctions," replied Emmanuel, trusting that his blush was subsiding, and that his father's ill-humour might subside.

"If the wall-fruit were ripe, or even ripening," fractiously resumed the old brewer, "I should fancy you spent your time here in trying to determine whether my predecessors of the Ursuline sisterhood were really as shrewd judges of fruit, as their renown in the country avoucheth. But since there is not an apricot on the tree softer than a shingle stone, I am forced to conclude that you find diversion in counting the hours on yonder old dial;—a somewhat more trustworthy teller of time than the bauble, thin as a *waferfelt*, which you brought back with you from your last visit to Brussels."

"The watch was a gift from my good aunt Helena," replied the young man, taking up the quarrel for his watch solely in the hope of diverting his father's attention from an embarrassment of manner which every succeeding observation of the old brewer tended to increase. "It were ungrateful on my part to criticise the present of so kind a friend."

“More than friend, if matters go as I could wish them!” replied his father, placing his hands deliberately under the flaps of his snuff-coloured coat,—a sure signal of his intention to commence his evening promenade up and down the central walk of the garden,—pausing only on an irresistible influence to flirt *en passant* with a hollyhock, or make eyes at a palma christi. “You must of course have concluded, Emmanuel, on receiving so costly a gift from your aunt, that she purposed more by it than a mere matter of kinswomanly remembrance?—You must have long perceived, both by her conduct towards you and my own, our intention to unite you with your cousin Camella, as soon as the girl is of suitable age, and yourself established in your profession?”

Had the old brewer deliberately devised a method of reducing the suffusion of his son’s cheeks to ashy paleness, he could not have been more completely successful. The face of poor Emmannel was blanched to the whiteness of Blanche Fleur, a certain spotless silver carnation, the pride of the parterre of Gabriel Zoon.

“You must have seen that the watch, bearing on its case my sister’s initials united with your own, was a troth-pledge from your aunt to her future son-in-law?”—persisted the old man.

“Believe me, sir, I saw and surmised nothing of the kind!” stammered Emmanuel, imperfectly recovering his powers of articulation.

“And a lucky young fellow you may think yourself,” resumed his father, not choosing to hear, “to be assured, in addition to an inheritance of which I don’t care to foresee your enjoyment these twenty years to come,—(my father, old Nicolas Zoon, praise be to the Lord! lived into his eighty-seventh year!)—to be assured, I say, of a dowry of four hundred thousand florins on the nail, and as many more when it pleases God to call my excellent sister to himself.”

“Certainly, sir,—most certainly,—if I entertained interested views in the matter,” faltered his son. “But I have as little desire to finger the dowry of my cousin Camella, as to attain

the heritage which you pain me by alluding to. I am content to be the object of your bounty, be it more or less."

"No great compliment, Master Emmanuel, unless you are equally content to be the object of my authority," retorted the brewer. "I have bestowed on you an education for which many a Flemish noble would be thankful; and expect you to show your gratitude by submission to the projects I have traced out for you ever since you were the height of my walking-cane."

Emmanuel Zoon had not courage to inquire of his father, (who was now stopping short in the middle of the gravel walk, not to admire a new species of lupine on which his eyes seemed fixed, but to collect his ideas and power of utterance for a copious explanation with his son),—whether the education thus bestowed, and the plans thus conceived, purported to secure his happiness in life ; or whether they were a mere evidence of despotic power exercised by the least tender of parents over the most unresisting of sons. He longed, however, eagerly longed,

to say—"If you mean me to be happy, father, dismiss the idea of this ill-sorted marriage from your mind."

"My sister, Helena Willems, is at the head of the first lace manufactory in Brussels," resumed Gabriel Zoon—"two hundred pillows at work, winter and summer! As far as Paris and London, the retail trade recognises the excellence of her work; and will give better price by twenty-five per cent for the veils and ellings of the widow Willems, than for those of any factory in Belgium. All she has to desire, in addition to this commercial prosperity, is to secure a shrewd and honest man of business for the management of the mines in the duchy of Luxembourg, in which she has invested the property realised by herself and her late husband: and where, I pray you, is she likely to find one more to her satisfaction, than in the future partner of her only child?"

"Am I to understand, then, sir," demanded Emmanuel, his dignity considerably touched by the surmise, "that the professional career to which I fancied myself destined, is to be com-

prehended in an intendantship to my aunt Helena's estates?"

"To the estates that will one day be your own—unless, indeed, (under my friend Vermaeghe's schooling), you should exhibit signs of sagacity as a lawyer, such as your proficiency in floriculture, or any other science worthy to occupy the intellects of mankind, gives me little cause to anticipate ;—in which case, it might be worth your while, or rather worth *my* while, to establish you as an advocate at Brussels or Ghent."

"And why not at Bruges at once, sir, since you seem so positively bent against allowing me to pursue the trade you have found so conducive to your own prosperity in life?"

"I might content myself with answering, *because* such is my pleasure!" replied the old brewer crabbedly—having resumed his usual shuffling walk.—"But since I must needs tell over my motives to you, one by one, as I might count the stamens of a seedling anemone, know that it is because I tender the happiness of my niece Camella sufficiently to think it all the better

secured at twenty leagues' distance from this same garden of the Ursulines, which constitutes the pride and pleasure of her uncle ! And now, sir," continued he, evidently by way of securing himself against a rejoinder, " having to make my Saturday evening payments to the men as they go from work, which I can manage without your assistance, I recommend you to betake yourself to your evening meditations, yonder in the old hornbeam arbour, in such sort as shall dispose you to receive with gratitude the maternal attentions of your aunt Helena on your arrival at Brussels."

" But I should deceive her, sir, I should deceive *you*, I should deceive *myself*, were I to pretend acquiescence in any such project of relationship !" said Emmanuel, pertinaciously following his father towards the iron door which connected the convent gardens with the cooper's yard of the brewery.—" This marriage is impossible ! My cousin Camella is a child,—a mere child !" —

" All women are children, I conclude, before they come to be women,—just as a tulip is a

bulb before it comes to be a flower," cried the angry brewer. "I don't ask you to marry. Camella Willems in her slaving bib and hanging sleeves. Eight or ten years hence is the soonest I should care to establish you in life; and *then* your patience will not be tried above a year or two by waiting for the heiress of eight hundred thousand florins.—Camella is now at least six or seven years old!"

"I danced her on my knee, with her doll on her's, the last evening I spent with her mother in Brussels!" retorted Emmanuel, shrugging his shoulders.—"As to waiting a dozen years, sir, to commence the real purposes and enjoyment of life—"

"Were it my pleasure, sir," angrily interrupted his father, "you should be compelled to wait twenty-four,—nay, to weary out your utmost span of existence, devoid of the means of subsistence, which I have a right to give or demise away from you to any person or persons who may administer to my happiness and comfort more than an ungrateful son!"

"In that case," faltered Emmanuel, (not so

irresolutely, however, as to be unheard by his father)—“in that case, I hope I have courage to entrust the maintenance of me and mine to the efforts of my own industry.”

“*Your* industry, — YOURS,—who have not vigour of arm sufficient to turn the mould of a flower-bed?” cried old Zoon, with increasing wrath, and still receding from his son.

“There exists an industry of the head, sir, as well as the hand!” modestly retorted Emmanuel; “and sooner than dwindle out my youth in expectation of becoming at last the husband of a spoiled child, of whose property I had drudged as the steward, I would apprentice myself even now,—having attained to manhood and years of discretion,—to any honest trade or calling in which my own exertions might secure my independence!”

This was the first time in his life that Emmanuel had ever ventured to defend himself against the tyranny of his father. Motherless from infancy, there had been no soothing womanly voice to interfere between him and the harsh authority of the crabbed brewer;—no one

to encourage,—no one to console. But he had at length armed his courage,—no matter how or where,—to remonstrate; and the consequence was a storm of rage on the part of the old brewer, which, being unutterable in words, he chose to concentrate into a furious bang of the iron door which he had been holding open during the latter part of his conference with his son. His rage was manifestly too big for utterance; nor was Emmanuel fully aware of the hurricane he had conjured up, till the door had been slammed in his face, and he found himself alone in the garden.

His first impulse was to obey at least one injunction of his angry father, and stagger to the seat pointed out for the benefit of his solitary meditations. But once there, what conflicting emotions excited his heart, soul, and body into a turmoil nearly rivalling that in which old Gabriel Zoon was making his way among the casks up-piled in his yard, into the store warehouse where it was his custom of an afternoon—a SATURDAY afternoon—to accompany the payments of the foreman to the men with suit-

able reproof or praise;—a peculiarity which strange to say, endeared him to his canvass-aproned Helots almost as the addresses of Napoleon to the soldiers of the *grande armée* endeared the *petit caporal* to his men. For old Zoon, though a severe father, was a master as mild as his own Faro;—perhaps because aware that the workmen he exhorted so humanely had neither right nor title to the inheritance of his money-bags, his Duchess of Brabant or Blanche Fleur!

But by degrees, the influence of the spot exercised itself benignly over the perturbed spirit of Emmanuel Zoon. Notwithstanding its vicinity to a languid canal, there was not a more fragrant spot on earth than the old Ursuline flower-garden;—and this was its sweetest hour of the twenty-four. The evening air was bringing out the exquisite perfume of the huge entangled mass of honeysuckle blossoms surmounting the wall from an old twisted stem which had flourished for a century past in the adjoining brewer's yard; sending up its wandering tendrils and exuberant flowers in hardened audacity, as if to exult over the trimly, bass-impr-

soned and stick-supported plants of Gabriel Zoon's aristocratic pleasure-ground on the other side. The laughing mass of bloom seemed to station itself on the top of the old wall, like a saucy schoolboy deriding the poor prisoners below. Even the cultivated flower-bed sent forth a thousand delicious evening odours. Spicy gillyflowers, savoury basil, pinks rivalling the *sachets* of a fine lady's boudoir, verbenas and heliotrope outplanted from the greenhouse till they attained unusual sweetness and size, had fortunately their humble place among the scentless and faultless monsters purporting to obtain for the old amateur silver medals from the horticultural society of Mechelen, and all the other flower shows of Western Belgium; and at the close of that fervid summer day, all these united into a "steam of rich-distilled perfumes," deriving an additional charm from the sprinkling of water recently bestowed by the gardeners on the parched mould. As poor Emmanuel rested a few minutes in his father's favourite arbour, it seemed impossible to enjoy an atmosphere more saturated with the incomparable perfumes of nature.

It was a still evening. Not a sound was audible in that secluded garden, unless when the carol of some happy workman wending home along the unfrequented quay from his work, disturbed the soft tranquillity of the spot;—except, indeed, the murmur of the bees among the beds of lavender and mignonette, expressly retained by the old brewer after the example of his predecessors the nuns, to allure thither the only visitants whose murmur appeared in accordance with the dreariness of its fragrant seclusion.

But though, on most occasions, this monotonous quietude was most acceptable to young Zoon, against whom the accusation made by his father of perpetually lounging in that still retreat was only too well founded, on the present occasion the tranquillity around him seemed to increase his irritation.

“Is it to be ever thus?” cried he. “Am I to be perpetually harassed and thwarted every time I pretend to have a taste or opinion of my own? In manhood as in childhood, am I always to find myself grovelling at my father’s

feet, simply because I desire to exercise the faculties of a rational being? Certainly not! The ice is now broken; and let the chasm widen as it may, I will stand my ground! Marry little Camella? Drudge through a double apprenticeship in a profession I abhor, to qualify myself only to screw up within limit of the law the tenants of my stingy old aunt? And for what?—that, after all this waiting and wasting of patience, when I am growing grey, and deaf, and blind, I may take a silly school-girl to preside over my household home;—a thing over which I should exercise the unwelcome control of a father, but from whom I could never expect the impassioned tenderness or holy companionship of a wife! Never, never! In marriage, I should require a perfect community of spirit,—a blending of heart with heart,—of life with life;—a progress hand-in-hand from the buoyancy of youth to the solemn gravity of age,—a union of thought, spirit, responsibility! And to find this, twelve or fourteen years hence, in the society of a girl I have seen whipped by her mother for comfit stealing,—whom I have

dandled an infant in my arms—and who, if she turn out but half so wilful a woman as she is a peevish, wayward, child, will secure the misery of her husband, were his temper that of Job, and her dowry that of a governante of the Netherlands !”

Such was the result of the first ten minutes of cogitation. So far from disposing himself for obedience, the more he reflected on his impending misfortunes, the more confirmed grew his spirit of insubordination ; till at length he started from his seat in the quiet arbour, and attempted to subdue his irritation by pacing up and down the gravel-walk skirting the blank abutment of the brewery on a line with the windows pronounced by his father to be of an aspect calculated only for the ripening of his Hamburgh grapes.

Ever and anon as he walked, Emmanuel kept raising his eyes in the direction of those windows, though perfectly aware that, from the depths of the garden, it was out of his power to command the smallest view of anything overlooked by the dwelling-house ; and the least sagacious observer

might have conjectured that his agitation was in some way or other connected with some object, animate or inanimate, visible from the windows of the little chamber which his father was fond of denominating his fiery furnace; and which, though the brewer's residence contained more than half a dozen spare bedrooms, the heir of the house chose to retain in his maturity as his city of refuge, as obstinately as it had been assigned to him in his childhood by his grudging father.

Because—(let us hope that the reader is anxious to learn WHY!)—BECAUSE from its pulley-less sash window he had first beheld NETJA!—

Again, dear reader, be good enough to exercise your curiosity, and inquire "*who* is Netja?" for unless you interest yourself in her destinies, there is an end of my story. And most assuredly you *would* have become curious concerning the fair neighbour of Gabriel Zoon, had you beheld the wistful looks cast upward towards the wall separating her domicile from his own by poor Emmanuel, as he petulantly traversed the

gravel-walk of the Ursuline garden ; feeling that neither the horticultural treasures and prodigies it contained, nor the thriving brewery adjoining, nor the hereditary residence of the family with all its accumulation of curious old furniture and precious pictures, were worthy to be placed in the scale against a single smile of that fairest and most melancholy of human countenances, the face of Netja Van Foere.

The first thing Emmanuel Zoon could recollect in this world of vicissitude, was looking out of that very window, and beholding that very Netja !—It was in his early childhood, almost in his infancy, after being corrected by his old nurse for some trifling fault as severely as motherless children are apt to be, that, as he laid his little pouting lip and swelling heart against the window-sill, he caught sight of a grave-looking girl, of twelve or fourteen years of age, who was sitting reading in the adjoining garden, (if garden could be called a narrow strip of court divided into flower-plots by borders of box,) while with her foot she rocked the cradle of a sleeping child. His sobs were still suffi-

ciently audible to attract the notice of his young neighbour, who looked up from her book—nodding to him and smiling with so sweet and comforting a countenance, that he soon forgot his grievances while wondering who that kind good girl could be, and who was the child in the cradle happy enough to be cared for by an attendant so scant of years.



CHAPTER III.

FROM that day dated their friendship. The lonely child of the Ursuline gardens soon managed to discover that his pretty neighbour was called Netja ; that her father was the husband of a second wife, and that second wife the mother of the babe in the cradle, a girl named Carolie ; and that though Netja was the kindest and fondest of sisters to the little petted stranger, neither father nor mother were satisfied with her care as a nurse, or her submission as a child. This discovery so far afforded comfort to Emmanuel that he began to see he might be worse off than in enduring the tyranny of his father and caprices of his nurse ;—that there were such things as stepmothers in the world

who were greater evils than aught beside. *He* thought them so at least, when, little more than a year after the commencement of his nodding and smiling, kissing and coaxing acquaintance with Netja, he found that his kind neighbour had furtively quitted her home, most likely for ever! One of his father's workmen affirmed that Netja had been so severely beaten by her stepmother as to have fled in despair—no one knew whither;—perhaps to seek service with some merciful mistress, perhaps to throw herself into the port of Bruges. But certain it was that, *if* dead, none mourned for her. The house went on as before. A serving girl was hired to wait on little Carolie; and in process of time, the name of Netja ceased to be mentioned by friend or foe. Nobody missed the poor submissive neglected child of Van Foere the chorister,—unless the equally submissive and almost equally neglected child of Zoon the brewer, to whom she had been more than sister, scarcely less than mother, almost a friend, and quite an angel. Months and years after she was lost to Bruges, the departed still appeared to Emmanuel in his dreams

whenever he was feverish or unhappy, breathing words of comfort, and never breathing them in vain.

Even after he grew to a reasonable age, and in pursuance of his father's whims was removed to the college at Louvain, one of his first visits on his return home for the holidays, was sure to be to his neighbour, Van Foere,—a man little qualified in his own person to attract the goodwill of a boy ; being a hard, square, ungainly lugubrious-looking man, always attired in black, and having something of the look of a sacristan or pall-bearer : whose deep bass voice, when he officiated in the choir, seemed to shake to its foundations the stately church of Notre Dame. Moreover, it was Van Foere's ambition to pass among his family and neighbours for as morose and surly a man as became the owner of so growling a bass—a bass, that superseded all necessity for the acquisition of a serpent in the choir ; and one of the chief reasons which caused him to resign himself so quiescently to the loss of his elder daughter, was his repugnance that Netja, who had so long beheld

him supreme under his own roof, should witness the ignominious state of nonentityism to which he was reduced by his second marriage.

It was not, however, to see either Van Foere or his termagant wife that Emmanuel visited the house. He was really fond of little Carolie, as a thing appurtenant to Netja. He had been accustomed to notice the little girl in her sister's arms; and could not even now look upon her flaxen curls, without remembering the occasions when he had seen them smoothed by the fondling hand of the lost Pleiad. Every time he came home, therefore, he brought a present for little Car. in memory of his first and only friend; and oftentimes made freer than was excusable with the flowers of the old brewer, in order to tie them up into nosegays, and fling them out of his window over the wall into the garden of his poorer neighbour.

All this was well enough so long as Emmanuel was fifteen, and Carolie Von Foere ten years of age. The old brewer, occupied with his business and his investments, his tulips and

carnations, scarcely recognized the existence of the humble lay vicar whose abode was divided from his by a party wall; save when occasionally they chanced to jostle in their egress into the street, and Van Foere uncovered himself to the very ground in token of deference to the arrogant neighbour, who paid nearly twenty times as much as himself in the way of taxes and imposts to the municipality of Bruges. What number or what manner of daughters that sable suited basso-cantante might have under his roof, appeared to Gabriel Zoon about as important as how many puppies his favourite mastiff might have borne at her last litter!

But when Emmanuel came to be twenty and a right handsome young man, and Carolie to be fifteen and a remarkably pretty girl, affairs assumed a different aspect: more particularly when, the old brewer having missed from his greenhouse some fine camellia or branch of scented azalea, it was suggested to him by his gardener that the flowers had most likely been presented by his son to the chorister's daughter! Old Zoon was startled by the information;—so

startled, that he said not a word on the subject to Emmanuel, as he would have done had the young man stood accused of purloining his flowers for any other view or purpose. But he thought the more ; and the result of his cogitations was the resolution he had recently expressed, to article his son to Vermaeghe the lawyer, instead of suffering him to follow his own calling at home.

For the brewer perfectly recollected having had occasion to call one day, a couple of years before, on Julius Van Foere, concerning certain parish business with the authorities of Notre Dame ; and being struck, on entering the quiet humble dwelling of his poor neighbour, with its low ceilings, brick floor, and dingy walnut wood furniture, by the extreme beauty of the young girl who sat bending over her lace-pillow near one of the casement windows, the rays of sunshine falling like gold upon her fair hair and transparent skin, till she looked like some ineffable creation in one of the allegories of Rubens,—so as to dwell upon old Gabriel's memory for the remainder of the

week, in rivalry with the beauty of Blanche Fleur and the Duchess of Brabant.

It was, consequently, only justice to the future peace of mind of little Camella Willems, to place her cousin out of the reach of such dangerous neighbourhood; and now that Emmanuel dared to manifest opposition to his projects, he had no hesitation in attributing the young man's disobedience to the attraction of the lovely face still inclining over the lace-pillow in the adjoining house, which he knew his son was in the habit of frequenting at least seven days in the week. Humble as was her father's condition, Carolie was generally known in Bruges as one of its prettiest maidens; and henceforward she was marked in the abhorrent mind of old Gabriel as a smiling mischief, the origin of all his domestic inquietudes, and sole bar to a marriage which was to secure eight hundred thousand florins to the enjoyment of his son.

So accurate in most instances is the judgment of parents concerning the love-affairs of their offspring! In point of fact, Carolie Van Foere

though only five years younger than himself, was regarded by Emmanuel as a child,—almost as mere a child with reference to himself as when he had first beheld her slumbering in the cradle, rocked by the foot of her sister; and though it was perfectly true that the young man visited daily the chorister's house, and that he laid violent hands on the finest of his father's flowers whenever occasion offered, with the view of tendering them as of old to the daughter of Van Foere, the object of all this devotion, and the passionate attachment by which it was suggested, was no other than Netja,—his own dear Netja of aforetime,—who had never ceased to treat him as a child, and who now almost loved him as her son.

It was on his last return from the college of Louvain, that, on entering Van Foere's house as usual, instead of finding Carolie bound towards him to welcome him home, Emmanuel perceived by her saddened aspect that the deep mourning she wore was dedicated to the memory of her overbearing mother,—(whose disagreeable company had been the only drawback to

his pleasure in frequenting the house). While preparing to offer his condolence to his little pet, he noticed also that the place usually filled by the defunct, was occupied by another grave-looking woman in black ; whose chair and lace pillow seemed already as well established in the place as though they had abided there from the beginning of time.

There was nothing in the aspect of the stranger particularly to attract his notice ; yet it *was* irresistibly attracted ! Her sable garments were of coarse materials, and the humblest make ;—her countenance was as sad and humble as her garments. Yet he could not take his eyes off her. There was something in the expression of her dark gray eye,—something in the graceful turn of her head, something of a sound of coming tears in her tremulous voice,—that reminded him, as in a dream, of days of old.—At length, the word,—the name,—the dearly-treasured name,—burst from his lips.

“NETJA !” cried he, “dearest, dearest Netja !” and in a moment (her start and blush having

at once verified his suspicions) he was by her side,—pressing her hands in his,—congratulating himself and her,—almost frantic,—almost weeping for joy,—as he called upon her to remember her plaything,—her *protégé*,—her child,—her own Emmanuel. Thus apostrophized, the grave woman passed her hand a moment over the pale forehead visible between the two dark bands of her parted hair;—*not* as if trying to recall her imperfect recollection,—but either to subdue the painful thoughts struggling there for mastery, or to brush away, unsuspected, the tear she did not choose should disgrace the usual composure of her demeanour.

“I scarcely hoped the Heer Emmanuel would remember me, after a lapse of nearly fourteen years!” said she.

“*Heer* Emmanuel?—*Only* Emmanuel!”—cried the young man, again fervently pressing her hand to his lips, in all the flutter of spirits which usually accompanies such unexpected recognitions. “To me, you have always been Netja,—my first friend,—my friend in affliction! I believed you to be lost to me for ever,

Netja ; and still, I never effaced *you* from my memory. I have prayed for you,—*to* you,—whenever I was in sickness and sorrow. As boy, as man, how often have I breathed your name aloud in the solitude of my chamber ;—as if the very sound was able to revive those blessed days, when by looking forth from it, I obtained the sight of a ministering angel, of whose compassion and tenderness I was secure. But it was all in vain, dear Netja !—Those dreary walls returned no echo to my cry !—I felt that my friend was taken from me. Nor dared I even interrogate those nearest and dearest to you ;—for I saw that some evil had befallen, which it was pain to *them* and would be double grief to *me* to dwell upon. But, God be praised, you are here again—never, never more to desert us !—Promise me, dearest Netja, that you will never desert us again ?”

The sad-faced daughter of Van Foere was now pale as death, and almost as tremulous as the young enthusiast by whom she was thus wildly apostrophized. It was so long, so *very* long, since she had been addressed in terms of

kindness and affection, that the surprise of the change seemed to impart more pain than pleasure. It was like the probing of a forgotten wound,—and she writhed under the sensation.

For some minutes, she appeared to forget everything but the past, and the young son, or lover, at her feet. But having accidentally cast her eyes towards the chair of Carolie, the only witness of this extraordinary scene, she beheld her young sister with her arms crossed upon her bosom, and her lace pillow forgotten before her; contemplating them both in such silent, and as it appeared to her saddened amazement, as to restore her instantly to herself.

Pressing back the tears into her eyes with the backs of her fair thin hands,—the hands of one who had suffered and was still suffering,—she drew several deep breaths, as if to recover the mastery over her throbbing heart.

“I thank you heartily for your remembrance of your old neighbour!” said she,—bringing her lace-pillow closer before her, as if to render impossible a renewal of Emmanuel’s frantic demonstrations.—“But I am come hither only to be

the mother of yonder dear child,—to watch over her as I was watching when first we made acquaintance. I am fitted now for a mother's task, Emmanuel. I have tasted bitterly of the cup of sorrow since it was my pleasant task to sweeten yours. But it would only ruffle the composure of mind so essential to my mission here, were I to allow myself to revert to early times. Be they forgotten, my kind neighbour!—Henceforward, let me have two children to watch over and care for, instead of one!”

The colour which had been driven from the soft waxen cheeks of Carolie by the agitation of witnessing so unusual a scene in a spot which, since the decease of her termagant mother, had been quiet as the grave, now returned; and with it, her usual industry and content. In a moment, the bobbins were at work again; and the shred of Valenciennes lace she was weaving, had progressed by the eight of an inch, by the time Emmanuel so far recovered his self-possession as to accept the chair pushed towards him by Netja,—taking his place, as an ordinary visitor, between the two sisters.

From that morning, his visits were daily renewed. It was not with the family of Van Foere as with more aristocratic houses, where caprice or desertion may exclude at times, even the intimates of the fire-side. Netja and Carolie were devoted to lace-making, the most sedentary of employments ; and it was only by unwearying labour at their pillows from morning till night, that they managed to maintain their little household in the order it retained so long as their father, whose voice was now breaking, had been the best paid chapel-singer in Bruges, and his wife the most thrifty housewife ; so that whenever Emmannuel perceived his father to be engrossed by the examination of his accounts, or drying his bulbs, or labelling his carnations, he had only to slip through an archway and down a narrow passage into an adjoining door, to be sure of the companionship dearest to his heart. *There* they sat, beside the open casement, from which nothing was visible but one of those red-brick Flemish walls, with its veining of mortar, which Van Hooghe delighted to paint ; nothing to abstract their eyes from

the pillow, with its complicated bobbins, on which depended the subsistence of their father,—or their ears from the sweet converse of the assiduous friend whose visits constituted the holiday of their joyless existence.

After the irrepressible outburst of feeling that accompanied their first meeting, nothing could be ostensibly calmer than the intercourse between the friends. That quiet room,—dull as a monastic cell,—would have made any excess of emotion appear sacrilegious. The glossy old-fashioned furniture,—the cat upon the window ledge, not sleeping, but looking gravely forth upon the dead wall, as if numbering the bricks,—the venerable myrtle-tree, which had stood in its pot of blue delft in the perpetual twilight of that gloomy room till it seemed to have forgotten how to grow,—all was in complete accord with the mild gravity of the sober-suited woman, who might have passed for as much a piece of inanimate nature as any around her, had she not at intervals unconsciously raised towards Emmanuel Zoon those deep gray eyes, in whose unmeasurable

depths abided a mysterious world of sensibility. To enjoy one of those looks, the young man was content to sit there, hour after hour,—silent as herself; or recounting to her in measured words, the news of the city, or of the far-off world beyond, whose rumours reached her so rarely; repressing the emotions of his young heart,—subduing the energetic accents of his manly voice,—subsiding into a stock,—a stone,—a moveable,—a jointstool,—so that this self-control entitled him to be received with indulgence by the gentle being who appeared to have wilfully reduced the ratio of her existence to the cold regularity of clockwork.

Yet all this time there sat unmoved, not three paces from his chair, one of the loveliest maidens of the city,—marvelling more than her words could have expressed had she dared to speak, how the grave sister, in her all but widow's weeds, who said so little and smiled so seldom, and in whose raven tresses more than one silvery thread was perceptible, should have attained such power over the mind of the young, handsome, joyous Emmanuel Zoon; who, before Netja's

arrival and during the lifetime of her mother, used to arrive there with a gift in his hand and a song on his lips,—and from whose window used to shower into their humble court, such beautiful flowers—the pillage of the Ursuline gardens!

For Emmanuel had ceased to note the very existence of Carolie who had been endeared to him only as the nursling of his own Netja,—Netja, who was now once more his own. But it was a matter of surprise rather than grief to the little lace-maker, who was too much accustomed to witness the servility of her parents towards their overbearing neighbour the brewer, to have ever dreamed of a husband in Emmanuel Zoon; and, as regarded his gallant courtesies, there were as good-looking youths, according to Carolie's ideas, among the young bowmen of the prize-shooting, or cuirassiers of the garrison of whom she caught a glimpse on Sundays and feast-days, at the cathedral, or on the parade she was forced to traverse to reach it, as the demure-looking personage into which the lively young collegian of Louvain had suddenly subsided

On the whole, indeed, she was content that the civilities of their neighbour should have taken this singular turn ; for their father, who delighted, during the intervals of his occupation, to booze over a pipe and a glass of Faro at the neighbouring beer-house, saw no objection in the long visits to his sober daughter of the equally sober young man, whose company afforded at least some interruption to the uneventful tenour of their day.

CHAPTER IV.

THIS position of affairs had been of more than six months' duration, and might have lasted till the intelligence of Emmanuel Zoon became as stunted as the myrtle-tree, and as drowsy as the cat, but for old Gabriel's sudden declaration of his projects for the future settlement of his son. The unexpected contrariety roused the lazy current of his blood ; or rather, impelled him to break through his self-imposed restraint. He could no longer sit there in silence watching the long fair fingers of Netja eternally throwing her lace bobbins, as though their touch were no longer capable of imparting the thrill of joy ; or noting the scarcely perceptible rise and fall of the nunlike wimple falling over her tranquil bosom, often the only indication

for hours, of her sharing the breath and life that seemed to have been bestowed upon her in vain, —now that the time was approaching when he must watch them no more, and the uplifted looks which occasionally searched into the very depths of his soul, fall upon an empty chair.

“We shall miss you much, Emmanuel,” said Netja, in her usual low sweet voice,—when he first announced his approaching banishment to Brussels. “We shall miss you *very* much !”

But as her eyes remained fixed upon her work during this tame declaration of sympathy, it did not satisfy the ardent feelings of the young man.

“And is that *all* ?”—said he, suddenly breaking silence. “I who have concentrated my whole existence in this room,—who have not a thought, wish, hope, or fear, beyond its walls,—I, who see nothing in this world, Netja, but *you*,—only *you*,—is this all I am to hear in assuagement of the pangs of absence !”

“I told you when we first met,” replied Netja, in a voice still lower and sweeter, but

not so firm as before,—“that I am here as a mother, and guardian; and must neither listen or give utterance to other words than may beseem that sacred character. I say again, that I shall miss you, Emmanuel, as I should miss Carolie, were she also to be removed to a distance. Like yourself, my existence is bounded within this room; and the loss of one or other of you would be like the loss of a dearer part of myself.”

Emmanuel shrugged his shoulders impatiently. A slight stamp upon the sanded floor caused the slumbering cat to open its green eyes, and erect its ears like a couple of notes of interrogation.

“You are both dear to me as my children!” persisted Netja,—still inclining her face over her work. “As such, have I taken comfort in your society, Emmanuel, through the spring and summer;—and when you are far away, Carolie and I shall enjoy the fragrance reaching us with the evening dew from your father’s garden, as seeming to bring with it thoughts and tidings of *you*.”

She spoke to disregardful ears! On her first declaration of indifference, (for the avowal of a maternal feeling towards him, appeared like a worse than indifference to Emmanuel), he had averted his face from her, and was leaning over the back of his chair, with his hands clasped over his eyes.

Moved by his affliction, Carolie, who seldom interrupted their grave conversation,—so much pleasanter was it to enjoy the brilliant visions of her own young imagination,—broke in with a few consolatory words;—the certainty of his indifference towards her inspiring her in reality with the kinswomanly affection affected by Netja.

“You must not increase the vexation of our parting, by letting us see you out of spirits, dear Emmanuel!” said she. “You know how fondly we all love you,—Netja,—I,—my father, even Britzen, who sits purring yonder in the window to attract your notice! When you used to come and wish us good-bye on the evening of your departure for Louvain, we never chose to be downcast about the matter,

but spoke at parting only of the joy of your return. So be it now! You will be back again at Christmas,—or at furthest for the fêtes of the carnival. All apprentices, even to humble callings, are allowed a glimpse of home at the carnival. And you will visit us, even *you*, Heer Emmanuel, turned into a grave grand gentleman,—a great lawyer,—and tell us of the fine fashions and fine ladies of Brussels.”

“I shall *not* return! I shall tell you of no fine ladies,—no fine fashions!” answered Emmanuel Zoon, in a hoarse and broken voice, “I shall come hither no more. My father condemns me to a residence in the capital. My father has arranged the preliminaries of my marriage.”

“And with whom?”—demanded Netja, in a voice that would have been audible only to the ear of a lover.

“With a young cousin,—a rich heiress.”

Involuntarily the mild eyes of Netja glanced compassionately towards her sister, betraying the idle hopes she had been cherishing on

Carolie's account, and her sympathy in the young girl's probable disappointment. But what was her surprise on beholding her push aside her lace-pillow, and clap her hands for glee, exclaiming,—“A young, rich wife?—a neighbour for us,—a charming neighbour! For you will allow her to be a neighbour to your friends, won't you, dearest Emmanuel? *You* will not be proud and churlish, like your father, to the poor chorister's daughters? Ah! what joy for us when you come to be in possession of the Ursuline gardens, to stroll among the flower-beds of an evening, when our work is done, with a cheerful friend in the ‘*Vrouw Emmanuel Zoon!*’ How pleasantly it sounds! Dear, dear Emmanuel! promise us that we shall find a friend in your new wife!”

The heart of the young man was too full for words. He saw, or thought he saw, that there was no sympathy for his troubles where he had most expected to find it; and rising hastily from his chair, rushed wildly from the house.

If ever there were a spot on earth calculated to subdue unnatural excitement of spirit, it was that

to which poor Emmanuel betook himself for the solitary enjoyment of his despair. Pursuing his lonely way along the dull embankments of the city, unmolested and unmarked, he began to recapitulate in his mind the long years of his enthrallment; and to consider the singular nature of the spell that seemed to bind up his very existence in that of Netja Van Foere. At Louvain,—at Brussels, even in Bruges,—he had made acquaintance with women of great personal attractions, and an age suitable to his own; whose cordiality towards the son and heir of the rich brewer might have secured the gratitude and affection of men more fastidious than himself. On the other hand, as regarded the charm of early association, Carolie was infinitely prettier to the eye of a stranger than her sister,—infinitely more encouraging to himself; yet *she* had never been more to him than a neighbour, a kind and pleasant neighbour, save as he reflected on her relationship with the beloved of his childish years.

But Netja,—absent or present,—young or old,—fair and light-footed as he had once known her, or now, sedate and saddened, the blush and

buoyancy of youth departed for ever,—was dear to every pulse of his heart! He knew that there was ill-report of her in the city; that a mystery was attached to her long absence and sudden return. He had noticed, that whenever she insisted (in repression of his demonstrations of love) upon her solemnity of vocation as mother to Carolie,—she never for a moment pretended to the dignity of womanhood,—never spoke of herself as wife or widow. Yet the fearful misgivings attached to such an equivocal position had not availed to lessen his attachment! She was ten years older than himself,—she was poor,—she was despised,—she was an object of suspicion to her neighbours. But she was Netja,—*his* Netja; the first human being who had taught him to recognise that gentleness and consolation of womanly soothing, which is usually learned from the tenderness of a mother;—the first and last to inspire him with a desire of perpetual female companionship,—as the congenial wife,—the faithful housemate,—the indulgent mother of children resembling her benignant self!—Com-

pared with such a woman, what were the frivolous girls competing for his notice at *Kermesse* or carnival ball?—mere empty futile things,—enraptured by a new trinket, or beguiled by a showy riband!

That, whatever might have been the evil fortunes of Netja, (consequent upon the bitter harshness which had exiled a child of sixteen from her father's house), she was pure in heart as the angels of heaven,—Emmanuel was as sure as of his existence. But that she was *conscious* of innocence, she would not have voluntarily returned to the humble and dreary household of the old chorister, the moment her sister needed a mother, and her father a house-drudge. No sooner was her enemy laid in the grave, than Netja had reappeared as from her own; and at an age, and endowed with a degree of beauty which would have procured to a worldly-minded woman worldly admirers and an independent fortune in life, she preferred the desolate dullness of her old home,—the laborious life of a lace-maker, earning her livre of tenpence a day,—and mothership,—tenderest mothership

over the fair thoughtless girl whose cradle she had rocked in infancy, and whom she now loved to fold to her bosom as a daughter.—Impossible to impute a shadow of blame to one whose tastes were so simple, whose affections so tender as Netja Van Foere !

But how was all this to be made manifest to his father,—even if the old gentleman could be prevailed to overlook the want of fortune and breeding of his neighbour's daughter? How was Gabriel Zoon, so learned in the tincture of a flower and delicacy of a blossom, to admit the charms of the time-touched face of the woman of thirty, who, from circumstances, had been as a mother to his son? Would the eyes, accustomed to dwell upon the fairness of Blanche Fleur, and stately port of the Duchess of Brabant, ever reconcile themselves to the saddened and tarnished depression of one who, albeit she had never been a wife, had the air of being “a widow indeed?”

“Had one look, one word, one smile of hers encouraged me to the attempt,”—mused Emmanuel,—as he pursued his wayward course along

the ramparts,—“ I would have hazarded the trial ; and failing success, have waited for her till my father shall have accomplished his destined years, even though they extended to a period doubling the span of life he sometimes claims as his own. Faded and wan, nay, even old and infirm, I would still have made her my wife;—reconciled to the loss of all I was renouncing, by the consciousness of fidelity to the first holy impulses of affection implanted by nature in my breast. But the case is hopeless ! Either she has too much heart, or none. Either she has loved, and is constant as myself to a first impression, or her cold unsympathetic bosom is incapable of the feelings that distract my own !”

Alas ! it was by the candour of her own lips, he was fated to develope the mysteries enveloping the destiny of his beloved !

CHAPTER V.

MISTY and cheerless was the following morning when Emmanuel emerged from the quaint old mansion of his father in the Ursuline Gardens, to keep a first appointment with the object of his first and only love; and were it not proverbially known that the events we most ardently desire usually occur under circumstances that deprive them of half their charm, nothing would have been more unaccountable than the desponding air of the young lover.

But there were heavy presentiments in his soul. The unexpected signification contained in a letter from Netja Van Foere that she would meet him on the morrow at the porch of the church of Our Lady, on the first sounding of the Angelus, gave him more pain than pleasure. Such a concession on the part

of the reserved and gentle Netja, was as a stepping down from her pedestal that jarred against his sentiments of adoration. An act so foreign to her nature, was a proof of either sudden weakness or supreme indifference.—How was he to reconcile himself to either?

At the appointed hour, however, he was on the spot; an hour when only the very devout or very laborious were astir in the city;—people without smiles on their faces, and of an aspect little in accordance with the buoyant feelings of a happy lover.

But Emmanuel was *not* a happy lover; and it afforded him only a momentary gleam of pleasure when, at the close of the earliest morning service, while the solemn roll of the organ and chaunt of the altar still seemed to linger among the groined roofs they had filled with echoes of prayer, the object of his attachment emerged from the porch, with the hood of her black *faille* falling deep over her face; and, without so much as a word of greeting, passed her arm through his, and directed his steps towards the ramparts.

“ I have that to say to you,” said she in a still lower voice than her usual soft and gentle parlance, “ which may not abide the presence of my young sister,—my innocent sister,—innocent and young as I was myself, Emmanuel when first your childish heart yearned towards me in friendship. —I could almost accuse myself of it as of a crime, that those friendly feelings should have warmed into more than brotherly regard ; for from the first hour of our meeting till now, never has there been a moment in which my heart could have regarded you with the sentiments of equality essential to reciprocity of love. You have ever been to me as a child,—whom I used to sooth and protect, almost as one of my own. Even thus, Emmanuel, I loved you from the first ;—even thus I love you at this moment.”

A bitter sigh burst from the soul of Emmanuel Zoon at this affectionate apostrophe. For he felt that he would rather be an object of hatred, than of this vaunted maternal love ; a transition from which to the passion he wished to excite, would have been almost criminal.

“Since, however,” resumed Netja, on finding that no other answer awaited her, “you have unhappily deluded yourself into a belief that the love enkindled in a young unpractised heart like yours by one for whom all the illusions of life are over can be more than a momentary caprice, know, Emmanuel, that there are other and graver obstacles to the affection you covet, than the decay of a blighted form or the coldness of an unresponding heart. Even were I fair and young as my poor sister,—even were I rich as the wealthiest heiress in the city,—there is that in my destinies which incapacitates me for becoming your wife. Did it never occur to you that there are deeper furrows on my brow and deeper sadness in my voice, than *mere* sorrow can occasion?—You, who have watched me with the eager vigilance of love, did you never discern in my faded cheeks and silvered locks the traces of deep despair, but deeper remorse?—Did you never say to yourself, while listening to my listless words, ‘*there* speaks a woman for whom all happiness on earth is over,—who

hath no past, no future she can dwell upon, and a present only till it pleaseth the God of all goodness to call her to himself?" Have I never seemed to you, dearest Emmanuel, like a blighted tree standing amid a green forest, on which the sun is loth to shine, and whose withered branches encumber the earth because no one is at the pains to clear away a thing so worthless?"

"You have never seemed otherwise to me," replied Emmanuel Zoon, in a hoarse voice, "than the dearest and loveliest of women; and as such I must ever regard you, say what evil of yourself you will!"

"You must *not*!" was the firm reply of his companion. "You *must* not and you *will* not. You will soon learn to see in me, as I see in myself, a child of sin and shame. Evil entreatment drove me away, Emmanuel, from my father's house; but it required something more to prolong my banishment. The harsh dealing from which I had fled in dismay as a child, would have ceased to appal me when I became a woman, and I should have returned

to Bruges to assert my rights, and claim my portion of my father's love, but that I might no longer intrude my guilty presence among the guiltless.—My glory had departed from me, Emmanuel.—I was become vile and worthless.—The ashes of humiliation were upon my head !”

Cold dews rose upon the forehead of the young man. He was at once eager and afraid to give ear to these impassioned avowals. From any other lips than those of Netja, he could not have listened to such defamation.

“So long as my father's wife survived,” resumed Netja, grieved to observe the excess of his emotion, but only the more resolved to proceed in her confessions, “never should I have presumed to approach his door. But when I knew him to be left alone in the world, alone, poor, helpless, with an equally helpless girl upon his hands, whose helplessness and loveliness amid so much poverty might betray her into evils and errors similar to my own, I took courage to arise and go to my father and to say unto him, ‘father, I have sinned against

Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy child!—For is it not written that such abasement at a father's feet shall procure mercy and tenderness in return ?”—

“Netja, you are dallying with me!” cried Emmanuel, with sudden warmth. “Speak out!—tell me the worst—if the worst must be spoken, and hath that in it which is to part us for ever; for were this suspense to last only a few minutes longer, my heart must burst with the agony your wild words have called into existence.—Speak, Netja, speak!—My life and death are hanging upon your explanation!”

“When I left my father's house,” she resumed, as if in obedience to his adjuration, “it was even at such an hour, and on such a morning as this; hopeless—cheerless,—with the whole world before me, and not a friendly face to greet me therein. I had been heavily beaten overnight by my step-mother, who spared me neither blows nor menaces; and, instead of crying myself to sleep, as was my wont, lay moaning with pain, and asking myself whether

it were not better, when morning dawned, to go and fling myself into the canal, than confront the daily renewal of my misery. My evil genius, dear Emmanuel, answered 'Yes!' and grieving only that I could neither imprint a farewell kiss on the forehead of the dear little sister whom I loved not the less for being daughter to so cruel a mother, nor hold for the last time upon my knee my loving little friend, my neighbour, the motherless Emmanuel, I turned the house-latch charily, and went forth—to *die*. And would—would that I had died!—

“Though desperate, I was not lost to the fear of GOD: and my first thought was to utter a prayer for mercy upon my mother's grave ere I took refuge in my own. She lies yonder, Emmanuel, in the church we have left behind us; and this very morning, even as twelve years ago, have I knelt upon the stone that covers her remains in the southern aisle of the old church, and prayed for her intercession with the Most High, in favour of her erring child. When then I bent my knees over the resting-place of her

who was a chaste wife in her generation, and lies buried among humble kindred blameless as herself, a sudden thought rushed into my mind that she had left those who might protect me from my stepmother, and redeem me from the evil fate I contemplated. Her sister was wealthily married at Brussels; and if I could only reach her, there was a home for me more inviting than the chilly waters of the canal.—Yet, again I say, Emmanuel, would — would that I had died !

“ I was scarcely sixteen.—I had not one doir in the world.—My clothes were mean below my condition, and unexchangeable for the means of such a journey; and when I rose up from my mother’s grave, I determined to make my journey on foot, living on charity by the road. And I did so !—I begged my way to the city;—and on arriving at the door of my kinsfolk, ragged and wayworn, was chidden away as an impostor !

“ At length, by dint of earnest prayer, I obtained a hearing;—and by my circumstantial details of my father’s house and conduct, such credence as procured me food and lodging. Still,

my mother's sister, heart-hardened by prosperity affected misgivings concerning me that exonerated her from taking me to her heart, as was her duty. All she chose to do was to comply with the sole request I had courage to make,—that she would place me in service in some respectable family.

“She placed me with a *rich* one, which was what *she* called respectable, where I was kindly used; and the unwonted peace I enjoyed, and the gentle words with which I was addressed, had such an influence on my feelings, that for a long time, I could scarcely answer without tears.

“I was young, Emmanuel! I needed of a mother's warning and restraining, as much as of a mother's tenderness.—I needed a voice to tell me there was a snake in the grass. I needed a voice to bid me beware of my own gratitude.—How shall I tell you all!—Within a year of the rash moment of quitting my father's protection, though still myself a child, I was about to become a mother.—You start!—I hear muttered curses betwixt your lips.—Yet the father of that

child was one who professed to love me as you do ;—professed, like you, that though his father required rank and fortune in his future wife, *he* was content with Netja ; and that, if the pride of his parents forbad all hope of their sanction to a marriage, which, without it, could not legally be solemnized, no sooner should his infirm old father bequeath him independence than the mother of his babe should become his bride.

“ I was content ! I believed in him,—for I loved him. His kindness to a poor outcast had first secured my gratitude ; his tenderness to the grateful girl, in time rendered her his slave. Before the hour of discovery exposed either of us to the indignation of his parents, he removed me to a place of shelter ; and when our child was born to us, Emmanuel, there wanted to my claims and comforts, only the name of wife.

“ Yet because I speak of him as thus submitted to parental authority, do not suppose him young, unguarded, and thoughtless as myself. His years nearly doubled my own.—He was a man of mind and authority,—a representative of

the people,—a servant of the throne ; one whom it behoved to bear himself blameless in the eyes of the world, as in those of his eternal Judge. On that point was he ever insisting. Amid all his love—and it was great—so great, that I felt not the extent of my sacrifice,—he had still before his eyes the terror of public opinion. It was not, in fact, the interdiction of his father and mother of which he had stood in awe, but that the world should know he had applied in vain for their consent.—What would people say ? was ever his reflection, if it came to be known that he had formed an attachment so much beneath him, as to be forced to screen it from his family by a clandestine establishment !”

“ And you could *love* this man ?”—exclaimed Emmanuel Zoon, with indignation.

“ Better than my life !—He was the first human being who had ever loved *me* !”

“ Not the *first*,” interrupted Emmanuel *My* affection preceded his.”

“ You loved me like a child—*he* with the strong affection of a man,—a thinking, acting, predominating, authoritative man ! A little fear

and a great deal of pride, I admit, mingled with the attachment that repaid his preference. Still, I did most fondly and truly love him, even before no especial bond of union conjoined us in one ; and afterwards,—after the first cry of the child that was his and mine saluted my ears, I would have walked barefoot to the world's end, Emmanuel, only to prove the excess of my devotion. We were very happy !—Yet I say again that, even then,—would I had rather died !

“ For there is worse to come. Will you believe it ? This child on whom I so doted,—this fair sweet child, who from the moment of her birth, bore on her little features the stamp of his own and of my deep affection, was to *him* a care and an incumbrance ! You know how dearly, by my nature, I love children.—You know how I tended the infant of my harsh step-mother,—you know how I fondled my little motherless neighbour. And *this* one was my own ;—and, dearer still, his own, and as such, more precious than the light of my eyes !—But he was naturally averse to children, as I was partial ; and this dear one he liked least of all,

as liable to bring his unblemished credit to disgrace. More than once did he express before me his regrets that, for both our sakes, it should have been *born alive* ; and instead of regarding it as a cement to render our future marriage doubly urgent, spoke of the little creature as a drawback, whose illegitimacy would hereafter affix a stigma upon bonds which had otherwise passed without reproach.

“Again, Emmanuel, I hear your muttered execrations ; and, alas, they are not likely to wax less bitter for what I have further to relate. For very soon, he ceased to allude to a future marriage. His father was on his death-bed. The hour of probation was at hand ; and when it came, and as soon as his filial tears were shed and dry I ventured to appeal to him for an early confirmation of his often repeated promises, he patted me smilingly and with an air of superiority on the head ; telling me that in his last moments, the old man had exacted a still *more* solemn promise of him to bestow his hand upon a noble kinswoman of his own ; and that his father’s testamentary disposi-

tions were framed with reference to this alliance !—

“ Poor, weak, friendless as I was, what had it availed me to remonstrate and defend my rights and those of my daughter ? Nay, why not own the truth though to my shame, that, at that moment, I thought less of insisting upon my claims to become his lawful wife and sharing his rank and fortune, than of imploring him, let his father’s will dispose as it might of his hand, to reserve for *us*,—for me and for my babe,—the precious endowment of his love. All I asked—all I besought—all I exacted was, that he would promise me to withhold from the heiress every indication of the passionate tenderness he had lavished on my happy self.

“ He promised—for he was used to promises ! They cost him nothing,—not so much as a qualm of conscience. And thus deceived, I submitted to what he swore to me was inevitable. Though, from that time, he absented himself for hours and days, and almost weeks together from my presence, on pretext of the business heaped upon him by his father’s death

and his new opulence, I was satisfied the moment he bewailed to me the hardness of his fortune and the ugliness of her who was to be his wife. When we did meet, he was tender towards me as ever; and more than ever intent upon gaining an ascendancy over my conduct and character. Alas! such efforts were little needed!—He was master over my destinies, as every man is master over the destinies of the woman in heart and soul his own!”

“The more sacred his duty, never to abuse such mastership!” interposed Emmanuel, in a gloomy voice.

“There were a thousand reasons for the gratitude which made me so much his slave!” added Netja, as if attempting her own exculpation. “On learning my connexions and ardent desire for tidings of those I had abandoned, he not only contrived to obtain constant information for me of my father’s health, but despatched to my poor home the succours of which it stood so much in need, without affording any hint of the cause originating his benevolence.”

“ I foresee all !” said Emmanuel, with sudden energy. “ This man abandoned you !—This man, so smooth-tongued and so beneficent,—who exercised his hateful influence over your girlish mind to blind you to the sin and shame of your position,—appeared before you one day to tell you that he loved you no longer !”

“ You mistake him. There was not mercy enough towards me in his worldly heart to decide him to the annoyance of witnessing my grief on receiving such a communication. He delegated the task to his man of business. He sent his lawyer, Emmanuel, to the poor girl, who so dearly loved him, to say that he felt it a duty to his position in life and the community, no longer to show the bad example conveyed by such a connection as ours ! He reminded me how dear had ever been to him the maintenance of his high character and the favour of his sovereign ; and called upon me to unite with him, if I really loved him, in making a sacrifice indispensable to his honour and happiness. On the eve of marriage, to see me again, he said was out of the question. But he en-

treated me to refrain from any indiscreet exhibition of grief; to accept the handsome provision he had secured me; and return to my friends and native city, leaving to *him* the child, for whose future advantage he was so much better able to provide than myself."

As Netja proceeded in her narrative, she had clung close to the arm of Emmanuel, as if to shelter herself under the protection of his attachment, from the shame of her avowals. Her voice was now almost stifled with emotion,—her steps were becoming tremulous and faltering. Yet without regard to these manifestations of weakness, no sooner had she uttered the last words of her confession, than Emmanuel drew her arm from within his own,—stopped short in the lonely path they were pursuing,—and clasping his hands abruptly before him, exclaimed, "But you did not consent?—This time you stood firm?—Do not—*do not* let me suppose your weakness extended to such base submission!"—

"Emmanuel!" replied Netja, gathering courage from his violence, and in accents whose

gentleness found their way to his heart,—“ do not withdraw your arm from me ;—for unsupported, I am unable to sustain myself. Give me your aid, dear friend !—the aid of a strong arm,—the aid of a kind heart,—the aid of a patient ear. So is it that those who *really* love, mark their devotedness ; rather than by giving way to impulses of passion which God hath given us as temptations to be overcome, *not* as guides to be followed !”—

Without a syllable of remonstrance, the young man instantly put forth his arm for her support ; drawing her more closely to his side, as though seeking to excuse himself for that momentary expansion of feeling. It was in a gentle and subdued tone he renewed his inquiry of—“ dear blessed Netja !—tell me that you did not sacrifice your child ?”—

“ No, Emmanuel !” replied the humble voice of his companion. “ I sacrificed *myself* !—I gave up the sweet smiles that were so dear to me.—I gave up the little clinging arms that used to entwine themselves around my neck.—I gave up the lisping farewell for the night,

which was as the balm of sleep to my watchful ears.—I gave up the morning greeting more cheering to my soul than dawning day!—*How* I loved her, needs not to tell you;—for I resigned her—gave her up for ever—only that her days might be prosperous—more prosperous than my own!”—

For a moment, her words were interrupted by struggling emotions;—but she soon found courage to resume.

“What could I have done for her but love her? To incur her father’s resentment would have been to leave us both no other resource than the hard extremity to which I had been driven three years before; and what I could bear to anticipate for myself, I had not courage to inflict on a little being, fair, innocent and joyous as the angels in Heaven! Expelled from my present home, I had none other but the necessitous one embittered by my step-mother’s cruelty, or the eternity wherein the crime of self-murder must separate me for ever and ever from the sinless spirit of my child. I took pity therefore, Emmanuel, upon myself and

her. *I submitted,—I obeyed!* The Count had obtained from his mother, my former mistress, her promise to adopt and educate his little girl; on condition of a complete rupture between us, and my solemn engagement to attempt no further intercourse with one who was to be reared as a lady of the land. This pledge was given to me in writing, signed with their double attestation. And so I went forth from the place where I had been so happy;—alone,—in the darkness of the night, that I might not grieve her little heart by the sight of the tears that accompanied my last kiss. She was asleep when I bent over her and imprinted it on her little forehead;—asleep and smiling, as though the angels of GOD were with her in her dreams, breathing promises of succour and solace now that she was to be deprived of a mother's tending. Disturbed by the fervour of my embrace, she stirred, as though she would have grasped her little fingers round those that parted the flaxen curls upon her forehead. Had she done so, I had never found courage to un-

clasp them, and leave her for ever!—But the hand of GOD was over us, and she slept on.— And again I say unto you, Emmanuel, would —would—that I had died !”

CHAPTER VI.

EMMANUEL ZOON dared not give way to the feelings struggling in his soul. He was afraid of again incurring the mild rebuke of his friend.

“ I need not tell you,” she resumed, “ that I took nothing from that house but the memory of my shame. A maintenance had been provided for me,—a stipend prepared. But I went forth, unknown to them all ; leaving every thing behind me that could ever recall to my recollection on how barren a waste I had squandered the treasure of my affections ! So long as I abided there, Emmanuel, I fancied that my whole love was transferred to her,—that all was absorbed in her. But on crossing for the last time the threshold of the house wherein my happiness had been so complete, I knew, by the

twofold agony that tortured my heart, how dear to me, even wronged as I had been, was the man I renounced for ever ! At that moment, I saw in him the lover of my youth ;—the first and only being who had been unto me a heart-to-heart companion ;—not the worldling, the politician, the cold and callous being who had said in explicit terms,—‘ My interests require that we should meet no more.’—Emmanuel ! woman hath a sorry portion in the justice of this life !”

“ But when he found that you had thus nobly taken your departure, Netja,” whispered Emmanuel, tenderly pressing her arm towards a heart throbbing with the earnestness of its sympathy,—“ he surely pursued you—inquired for you—and strove, in spite of yourself, to better your condition ?”

“ I know not—I never asked !—All I sought was concealment, that I might lie down and wrestle unnoticed with my despair. A trifling sum, the guerdon of my service in his mother’s house, which I had laid aside as though in mockery of myself, I felt entitled to take with me, to procure the daily bread for which I knew

that trouble and weakness would for a time incapacitate me to labour. And well was it that I did so ; for many months ensued ere I was able to rise from a bed of sickness, in the obscure retreat to which I betook myself. Not far from *her*, Emmanuel ! Hard by the stately mansion where I had first served as a menial and then been worshipped as an idol, I found an humble lodging ; and when the days of convalescence came, my first care was to creep to the window, and watch beside it from morn till night, to see my lovely one carried forth to take the air. Her father did justice to his promise. She was tended as a daughter of his father's house ; and in that short interval, had grown and thriven till I almost grudged her the beauty that had come upon her otherwise than when nestled in my bosom. Still, it was a sight of comfort for me,—a sight of comfort and joy ; and I felt that I should have strength to labour for my own living, so long as that ray of sunlight shone upon my misery.

“I am wearying you perhaps, Emmanuel ; for in speaking of *her*, I seem to find pleasure

in dwelling upon my words. Forgive me, dear friend;—and you *will* forgive me; for indulgence towards such weakness is the very soul of friendship! Well, then, I worked, and was content.—I hardened the hands grown feeble with luxury, to the tasks of the poor; and by the blessing of providence, three years of probation and privation passed over my head, in which I scarcely quitted for as many hours the chamber overlooking the dwelling-place of my child. It was as a lacemaker I earned my pittance: and my life was divided between that easy task and moments of joy that were as the blessedness of a better sphere. Sometimes, however, now that she was older and had reason in her words, I longed so sorely to hear her voice, that, well aware no vestige remained in the poor workwoman of the young fair mother she had seen bedecked in rich attire and covered with loose flowing tresses which I had shorn away as emblems of my shame, I used to follow her in her walks, and ask alms of her, that she might stop short and fix her little eyes upon me, and her attendant to do an act of charity towards me. And

when tears of joy mingled with the blessings I lavished on her benevolent heart, they mistook a mother's yearning for the mere gratitude of a beggar!—

“I had no fear of encounteriug *him*. He was busy with his duties in the senate,—busy with his service as a courtier,—busy with his pleasures as a man of the world;—and even had some luckless hazard driven him across my path, how was he to recognise in the coarsely attired peasant, the girl on whom he had delighted to lavish all the splendours of luxury?—

“But alas! that darling child, my sweetest Looisje was so touched by our frequent encounters, that at the end of the second year she used to speak of me as her poor beggar woman, “her own poor beggar woman,” till the name came to be a byword in the household of her grandmother. The old lady, home-ridden and infirm, took little heed to such matter; but the child so prattled and interested others by her prattle, that one day, one fine spring day, such as those on which I had accustomed the darling

of my heart to expect my petition at the corner of the Boulevards she had to cross to reach the park,—the hard, proud young countess for whom I had been sacrificed, said to her husband in order to persuade him into giving her his arm for a walk,—‘ Let us walk together and see this pet beggar woman of Looisje’s !’—a luckless caprice—but for which, my happiness might have endured for ever!—

For though, on seeing them approach, I attempted to escape, it was too late. At sight of *him*, Emmanuel, my strength failed me, and I fell prostrate on the pavement. The child instantly ran forward to succour me. But her attendants interposing, drew her away ; and it was in the arms of a charitable stranger I awoke to consciousness. But alas ! when lying thus insensible at his feet, with my face bared to the air by officious interposition, he recognised me ; and from that day, the child came forth no more for her daily walk.

“ For weeks, I submitted to her absence. At length, I took courage to inquire of the countess’s porter, whether my little benefactress

were confined by illness to the house. But I was driven away as a bold beggar ; and a day or two afterwards, when I looked at early morning from my window towards those of my child, saw black draperies affixed to the doorway, and a *chapelle ardente* established under the *porte cochère* !

“ I had not voice or courage to breathe the fatal inquiry of, ‘ Who is numbered with the dead ? ’ But the greatness of the family rendered them a matter of curiosity among the neighbours ; and my landlady fortunately volunteered the information that the old countess, mother of the deputy for——, was to be interred that morning.

“ After the funeral, the family quitted the house. Looisje and her nurse were not among them ; probably because the child had been removed during the illness of its grandmother. A placard of sale was affixed to the door-posts. Strangers established themselves in the old familiar house ; and now, how was I to obtain intelligence of her without tidings of whose well-being, life was a blank ?—I left no means

unattempted. I pursued my inquiries in all directions ; still, without result. No one knew what was become of the old countess's *protégée*, or no one would tell.

“ I bore this suspense long, Emmanuel,—*very* long ; for I flattered myself, that in the winter, the little girl would return from the country in company with the count and countess. But she came not ; and my strength of body and mind being now exhausted, for food had ceased to nourish me, or sleep to refresh, I ventured to address a few lines to her father ; reminding him of his engagements towards me, and that, his mother being no more, it behoved me to learn who was to succeed to her guardianship over my child.

“ No answer was vouchsafed me ; and in the impatience of a distracted heart, I hazarded a second letter. Then, indeed, he wrote, and in what terms ?—He bad me ‘ respect his domestic happiness and cease to molest him ! — My daughter,’ he said, ‘ was placed for her education in an establishment where her health and morals would be properly cared for ; but that, on the

slightest renewal of my attempts to interfere with her in violation of the treaty between us, his bounties should be withdrawn from her for ever !’

“ Again, Emmanuel, did I submit ! But by this time, I was broken-hearted ; and since it was worse than grief to me behold the walls which no longer contained the sweet object of my love, I determined to humble myself to my father, and live and labour in my native city ; though rather as an act of atonement and expiation, than for any joy in the return.— My stepmother was still alive ; so that it was only by stealth I obtained an audience of my poor old harassed father, now as much the object of her tyrannous persecutions as I had been in my youth. It was long before I obtained pity and pardon at his hands. But in the end, the sense of a common misery reunited us ; and many a time did he escape from his disorderly home to my humble chamber, and sit there in stillness and seclusion watching me at work. I had promised myself at the expiration of a year to return to Brussels,

and make a secret attempt to discover the residence of my little girl, for a mere glimpse of her face in the chapel of her convent. But when the time came, my stepmother had just departed this life, and my father shown me so great a mark of esteem and confidence, as to recall me to her place, and consign my young sister to my guardianship. — Judge whether I had a right to demur!

“The rest, Emmanuel, you know. Whether the remnant of my days is to be smoothed by the sympathy of the true friend I trust to have obtained in my little playmate of the Ursuline garden, must depend upon yourself!”

The feelings and perceptions which just then perplexed the mind of Emmanuel Zoon, were of too complex a nature to admit of his bestowing on his gentle companion the assurances and encouragement of which she stood in need. He appeared resigned, however. He ceased to indulge in exclamations of irritation or disgust; and scarcely noticed that, by degrees, Netja had directed his footsteps home-

wards, till they were arrived on the confines of the suburb leading to the Ursuline quay.

“And now, Emmanuel,” she resumed, more cheerfully, “now that we are about to part, and never, I trust, to renew a subject or discussion likely to provoke a difference of opinion between us, I have a favour to ask you.”

A gesture implied the eager acquiescence he had not breath to utter.

“You are going to Brussels.—Be my delegate!—Prosecute for me the inquiries I am not able to pursue. No great mystery can envelop the residence or household of a public man,—a representative of the people—*een vertegenwoordiger*.—Make it your duty then, to ascertain whether the holidays of my Looisje are spent under her father’s roof.—See her, if you can ;—see her,—speak her kindly, and look into her face with the friendly eyes you have oftentimes bent on mine!—*This* will be a proof of friendship,—*this* will be an act of affection.”—

“It shall be done!” was all he could utter in reply.

Having now reached the swing bridge leading towards the premises of Gabriel Zoon, they parted,—without another word,—without another look ;—for the hearts of both were full. But in that parting hour, Emmanuel echoed in the depths of his heart the former bitter cry of his beloved Netja,—“ Would—*would* that I had died !”—

From that day, Emmanuel was seen no more in the house of the lay vicar. He had accepted his mission. All he desired was to accelerate as much as possible the term of its accomplishment, in order that he might be at liberty,—free to die,—free to escape from a world in which his hopes of happiness were gone. —What was it to *him* to become a wealthy burgher of Bruges, to inherit the rich homestead and Usurline gardens, since he was denied even the comfort of respecting his poor Netja as the type of all womanly excellence.

Arrived in Brussels, Emmanuel had no difficulty in finding the residence of a man so eminent as the Count de L——; for though

his own consequence was miserably diminished by transition from the quays of Bruges to the streets of Brussels, that of his rival was secondary only to the throne. By a gratuity to one of the hangers-on of the house, he ascertained that no little girl was ever seen under its roof;—that the two sons of the count, boys of seven or eight years of age, were under the care of a preceptor; and when he expressly referred to a “poor foundling, a *protégée* of their master’s family,” he was informed that the child in question had been removed from the house a few weeks previous to the decease of the old countess, either to be sent back to her friends, or placed in some public establishment.

All this was sadly discouraging; nor did it surprise Emmanuel to receive in answer to his communication, a heart-rending epistle from Netja; conjuring him as her brother—son—friend—as all that remained to her on earth, to leave no stone unturned for the enlightenment of a mystery vital to her existence. She who had spoken to him so mildly—so submis-

sively, seemed suddenly roused to the impetuosity of the lioness bereft of her young.

He determined to address himself personally or by letter to the man in authority; but his letter remained unanswered. He wrote a second, more peremptory in tone, requiring of the man whom he loathed with the loathing we bestow only on a rival or reptile, to "account for the person of Looisje, the illegitimate daughter of one Netja Van Foere, committed by her mother to his charge." Still, no answer was returned; and, when Emmanuel again presented himself in person at the gates of the great man, he was answered by the servants with the air of saucy defiance peculiar to the menials of the great.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW alternative presented itself. One of the leading burghers of the flax-growing district represented by the Count de L——, was connected by commercial interests with the family of Emmanuel; and to this gentleman he addressed himself for permission to bear him company the first time he should have occasion to visit the noble deputy.

This was easily accomplished. A few days afterwards, Emmanuel found himself following the Herr Vermeirsch into the handsome study of his Excellency the Count de L——; and as he had expressed only a curiosity for a private view of a man renowned in his public capacity, the introducer fancied he did enough in naming him as “a young friend of mine, lately launched in the legal profession.”

The visitor had now to listen to a desultory conversation between the elector and his representative, concerning colonial and indigenous sugars,—a reduction of the duties on flax,—colonisation in Guatemala, the influence of the Zoll-Verein in Belgium, and other legislative topics, already more than sufficiently discussed in the Chamber; and could Emmanuel have been amused by any thing at that agitating moment, it would have been the care of the learned deputy in breaking up his political arguments into very small pieces, and wrapping cotton round the angles, lest they should do a mischief to the overgrown booby to whom they were given to play with.

At last, Herr Vermeirsch rose with abundance of bows and *congéés* to take leave; and as he was progressing towards the the door, Emmanuel came resolutely forward towards their host.

“I am the person,” said he, “who has repeatedly addressed you, Monsieur le Comte, on the subject of the child Looisje.”

The countenance of the deputy, which had

been clothed with benignant smiles to part with his constituent, instantly fell.

“I have not the honour to understand you, sir!” said he, with an air of defiance. “If you have any communication to make me on the subject of any *ward* of mine, you will have the goodness to address it to my man of business, the Herr Vermaeghe, whose office is in the Fossé aux Loups.”

“I have a communication to make you, Monsieur le Comte, on the subject of *your daughter!*” was the firm reply of Emmanuel Zoon. “I am myself a member of the legal profession; and whether in my capacity of lawyer, or my capacity of man, will not be trifled with.—I require of you——”

“What is all this?”—cried the terrified Vermeirsch, returning from the door on hearing what appeared to be an altercation between his honoured representative and his audacious young friend.—“Emmanuel, you are forgetting yourself!—Is *this* your deportment towards one whom you pretended a wish to see, as one of the most eminent men in Flanders? I

entreat you, Monsieur le Comte, to accept my humble apologies for his folly !”

“ Enough, enough, my dear sir !” cried the count,—who, having already rung for his attendants, a groom of the chambers and tall chasseur were holding open the door of the antechamber. “ Believe me, I appreciate you too highly to attribute to your share any portion of the gratuitous offence offered.”

“ You will hear from me, Monsieur le Comte !” said Emmanuel, with grave self-possession, satisfied that in a struggle against three powerful men, he should only render himself ridiculous.—“ You have avowed your evil intentions : expect the full retaliation they deserve.”

Having rid himself of the company of the irate old flax-merchant, Emmanuel hurried back to his office ; much admiring that he should have wasted so much time and so many weeks in fruitless attempts to obtain information, probably contained in the very deed cases of green pasteboard that were piled around the study of his principal. He lost no time in

entering into conversation, incidentally as it were, with Herr Vermaeghe; but so cautious were his replies, that Emmanuel saw in a moment the subject had been discussed between the lawyer and his client immediately on the receipt of the first letter; and that his only chance of success, without creating a scandal fatal to the future interests of Looisje, was to wait for some future contingency likely to throw all parties off their guard. For the count was still unaware that the saucy clerk by whom he had been addressed, was articled to his own notary; or that the friend of Netja to whom he had called the attention of old Vermaeghe as likely to wait upon *him* for news of the child, was no other than his clerk.

At the close of two months, however, he had not advanced a single step towards obtaining the confidence of his employer as regarded the affair of the Comte de L——; and began almost to despair!—The clerks of the office had each his department. That of Emmanuel was at present wholly subordinate; and the second clerk, the delegate intrusted by Ver-

maeghe with the business of his noble client, was a young man of considerable ability but dissolute habits, between whom and Emmanuel there existed no intimacy.

As the year advanced, however, Emmanuel, who saw in his colleague the only channel to his object, so far conquered his antipathy to young Hasselaen, as to assist him in those duties of office which his habits of dissipation caused to accumulate upon his hands. By degrees, this spirit of conciliation encouraged the improvident young man to make other demands on the goodwill of one who was perfecting his studies in a notary's office only with a view to government employment; and little did the profligate clerk conjecture how welcome to Emmanuel Zoon were these inroads upon his purse. So prompt indeed was the generosity of the junior clerk, that Hasselaen, instead of being overcome with shame, was encouraged to make further demands; till Emmanuel stated his inability to produce the sum required.

"In a week's time," said he, carelessly, "I trust I may be able to oblige you."

They reached the Saturday preceding the last Sunday of the Carnival, however, without a word transpiring auspicious to his hopes. The hour for closing the office arrived. The green boxes were in their places; the desks closed for the night; the shaded lamps extinguished one by one; and the key was carried to old Vermaeghe by the head clerk, to be laid by till the Monday following. Hasse-laen was surprised to find that Emmanuel instead of bidding him as usual a dry good-night, seemed inclined to join in his walk homewards; a movement to which, hoping it might lead to the despaired-of act of liberality, he afforded every facility.

As they were passing the noble hotel of the Count de L——, on their way to the Montagne de la Cour, Emmanuel suddenly exclaimed in a tone of assumed indifference, "What sort of lads are old L.'s two sons growing up?—I remember a pretty little girl of his, who used to live with her mother the dowager, who either died or was sent to school on the decease of her grandmother."

“No, she did not die,” replied Hasselaen, little conjecturing the anxiety with which his companion awaited his answer. “I scarcely know what became of the poor child. But it must have been an iniquitous business in some way or other, our old fellow has been so plaguy cautious in keeping it to himself!”

“I should be glad to find out, for I know those who were interested in the child,” observed Emmanuel, as coolly as he could.

“Had you asked me the question an hour ago,” replied Hasselaen, “I would have made it my business to answer you; for, in the file of the Count de L.’s accounts, I should doubtless obtain some sort of information. But the office is sealed till Monday morning, and will be closed again on the morrow. We do no business here on Shrove Tuesday. Till this year, alas,” he continued, “I have always made a delicious day’s work of it on *Mardi Gras*. But I am just now at the end of my purse.”

“On Monday evening,” observed the overjoyed Emmanuel, “I will accomodate you with

the sum you asked for, if you oblige me in your turn with news of the child Looisje."

On the Monday morning, accordingly, the business of the firm of Vermaeghe and Company was as carelessly performed as might be expected, when one of the clerks was occupied in searching files of private accounts, and another in watching his proceedings from a distant desk. But a notary who expects his young subs to perform their duties in a dutiful manner on the penultimate day of the carnival, deserves no better; and if his papers were less carefully engrossed than usual, Hasselaen, had managed to secure the means of ample festivity for the following day, and Emmanuel Zoon, for the accomplishment of the object dearest to his heart. He retired to rest that night, rejoicing that, on account of the holiday, the city would be astir betimes on the morrow; so that he need not lose an hour in verifying the authenticity of the information obtained for him by Hasselaen.

The Carnival is becoming almost everywhere a worn-out name and exhausted pleasure, for

two reasons, auspicious to the history of mankind. People are becoming too enlightened to be amused by senseless mummeries ; and too much at ease throughout the year, to indulge in the single day's outburst of frantic merriment into which they were goaded when the sackcloth and ashes of Lent imposed upon them by the priest, formed an insupportable burthen, and the whole year round a series of fasting and mortification. That the fantastic maskings of the middle ages lingered longest in the most austere Catholic countries, proves that the "farewell to flesh" was a moment of festivity only where the subsequent fasting was of rigorous infliction.

It was in the large capitals the observance of the Carnival became first disregarded ; and, at the present day, *Mardi Gras* is uproariously celebrated in proportion to the poverty and savageness of the population. The higher classes have ceased to regard it as an epoch of festivity. At Brussels, however, which is Catholic as Rome, the people still hold in veneration the tides and festivals of the church bequeathed to the respect of Flanders by the Spanish and

Austrian domination; and Shrove Tuesday is accordingly ushered in by the ringing of bells and parading of gendarmes, who, though superfluous for the regulation of gay equipages conveying masks, as in the days of the *gouvernantes* of the Netherlands, are wanted for the removal of obstructions round the doors of the beer-shops and dancing-houses, or to clear away for a few groups of buffoons who, in hired costumes of the meanest kind, repay themselves by a day of privileged uproar for the decencies imposed upon them at more orderly seasons of the year.

The only persons, to whom the display of their brief madness seems to afford real entertainment, are the young children, for whom *Mardi Gras* is a universal holiday; and from an early hour, the windows of the principal streets are lined with fair and joyous faces patiently awaiting from daybreak the parading of the masks, which occurs only in the afternoon. Happy the grandame who possesses a mansion with windows that command some stirring thoroughfare; for, on this occasion, it is her privi-

lege to assemble round her the united ramifications of her olive-branches,—the offspring of her sons and the offspring of her daughters ; and a pleasant sight it is to wander through the streets and see the little creatures, with their glossy curls and holiday attire, grouped round some white-haired grandfather, to whom they point out the passing masks, and from whom they demand explanations, even to the babe in its young mother's arms, which can do no more than utter cries of delight at the glowing colours of the motley throng struggling in the streets below.

CHAPTER VIII.

YET the sight of these young faces, delighting and delighted, protected by the parental love for which their little endearments afford such rich requital, produced only a pang in the heart of Emmanuel, as he proceeded the streets in pursuance of the melancholy errand he had that day imposed upon himself.—He seemed to understand and appreciate, for the first time, the strength of the tie uniting child and parent; and apprehend the anguish that awaits a mother forced to unclasp from around her neck the clinging hands of her soul's treasure.

“To deprive her of the sole solace of her misery,—to part her from her child! What were all his iniquities compared with *that*?” was his secret ejaculation, as he pressed his way onwards, attracted every moment by the aspect

of some cherub face smiling from the windows above, while patiently waiting the coming of masks that came not; and his heart grew heavier and heavier, as he approached the gloomy old portal of a quaint brick building of the sixteenth century, evidently of monastic origin, though so far modernised by the march of civilization, that through the dim green panes of its grated windows, flowers were perceptible.

On the summons of a jangling bell, hastily touched by Emmanuel, the iron-knotted oaken door grated on its hinges, opened by a little deformed old woman. All that presented itself within, exhibited the barn-like, stable-like air of ancient charitable institutions, ere Benevolence became curious in the orders of architecture, and it was found impossible to love one's neighbour as oneself, save through the medium of a Greek noun. For this was the Orphan House of Brussels! to which gloomy, desolate abode Hasselaen accused the Count de L—— of having consigned the child of Netja, as the safest mode of ridding himself of the incumbrance!—

“What is your pleasure?” inquired the old

woman, who appeared to enjoy a monopoly of infirmities, being blind and deaf as well as halt.

“I wish to visit the *hospice* !—” replied Emmanuel.

“There is nothing to be seen here to requite the curiosity of strangers,” said she, after the request had been several times repeated ; “nor is it the custom of the place to make a show of it.”

At that moment, a loud shout of hilarity became audible through a black door at the head of a small oaken staircase,—a sound strangely at variance with the depressing character of the spot.

“Hark !” said the old portress ; “the children are at play. This is one of the four holidays of their year. No work to-day !—I thought probably that monsieur was come, as so many gentlefolks do, to give a commission for work to the *révérende mère* ?—Our young people are the best needle-women in Brussels.”

“Such is my object !” cried Emmanuel, instantly seizing the idea.

“In that case, return to-morrow at noon !” said the old woman, about to close the huge door in his face. “The *révérende mère* never sees a soul upon business on *Mardi Gras*.”

A dollar, slid into her bony hand, however, inspired a different conviction ; and, bidding him walk into the *parloir*, she offered to go and summon the superioress. Emmanuel now found himself ushered up the stairs he had noticed ; the black door of which led into a mean white-washed corridor, along which groups of children of all ages, were racing in joyous sport. He had not, leisure to bestow more than a glance upon these little outcasts ; abandoned by their parents to the charity of strangers, and so differently cared for from the children of luxury he had been admiring without. A door being thrown open to the right, he found himself in a great square uncarpeted room, the plastered ceiling of which was adorned with old-fashioned scroll-work ; the compartments containing, in embossed letters, the holy names of “Jesu Christi,” “Maria purissima,” and other

similar inscriptions, coeval with its ancient foundation.

In medallions on the wall were inscribed, in black letters, certain Flemish moralities, or *Zedelessen*, admirably calculated to teach the young ideas of the little orphans how to shoot; such as—“ *Den Godsdienst moet gy steeds met hert en ziel aenklesen. Dan slechts kan men den naem van eerlyth man u geven :*” or “ *De erkentelykheid is het gehengen des herten.*”*

The only further ornaments of the parlour, where the children and their instructresses were allowed to hold intercourse with their relatives, was a framed piece of needlework, representing a holy family,—the golden glory surrounding the head of the virgin, having very much the appearance of a coarse straw bonnet; and a portrait in black chalk of the present or some former superioress, probably the *chef-dæuvre*, (like the singular group we have described)

* “ Be ever faithful to religion, without which you can never become an honest man,” “ Gratitude is the memory of the heart.”

of one of her pupils, more grateful than skilful, who had bestowed on her the air of a saint distorted by the agonies of martyrdom.

While Emmanuel was contemplating these adornments of a chamber that would have looked like a prison but for a few fine hyacinths in the window-seats, tributes of gratitude from the friends of the poor children, the matron, a simple cordial middle-aged woman, entered the room. She had been apprized, she said, by the portress, that the gentleman wished to get shirts made in the *hospice* ; but had as much sewing in hand as would occupy her classes for some months to come.

In reply, Emmanuel apologized for having deranged her from her duties on so fruitless an errand, on a general holiday ; and from this remark, the transition was easy to the state of her pupils, and the number dependant upon the tender mercies of the institution.

“ You have among them,” observed Emmanuel, “ a little girl, placed here by the Count de L——. Let me see !—Looisje must now be ten years old ?”—

“To be sure she is!” cried the superioress, instantly falling into the snare; “and a sweeter little girl never came into a teacher’s hands. Had it been in my power to undertake the work you propose, sir, you would not wish to have the stitching better done than by the little hands of Looisje, who works like a fairy!”

The matron, already contemplating her visitor with considerable deference, as the friend of so great a man as the Count de L——, now proposed to afford him a sight of the institution, —its humble dormitories and refectory; as well as the poor children, whom she seemed to fancy scarcely worth the exhibition, unless occupied in the routine of the daily tasks accrediting the zeal of her superintendence; and Emmanuel, whose heart was divided between the joy of having accomplished his promise, and the indignation of finding the child of Netja included among the pensioners of a public charity, followed her guidance into the corridor, where a horde of children wearing the unsightly uniform of the *Hospice*, were playing at blind-man’s buff. At sight of the superioress, their

little laughing faces became demure, as they instinctively ranged themselves in line; as if for the express purpose of enabling Emmanuel to search out among them the owner of the long flaxen ringlet, fondly exhibited to him by Netja at parting, to facilitate his recognition of her lost treasure.

But alas! these wards of public charity were stripped of all such extraneous adornment!—A close cap was fitted to each well-cropped head; and how was he to detect the little victim? The superioress probably noticed his look of blank disappointment as he surveyed her little flock; for addressing one of the elder girls, she hurriedly inquired for Looisje.

In reply, the child pointed to a distant window-seat, opposite a wooden Madonna inserted into the grim old wall; and lo! the eager eye of Emmanuel fell upon a young girl, arrayed like her companions, but too much absorbed by her book to notice either their tumultuous gaiety, or the interruption of the superioress's approach. Even when they almost reached the window-seat, the little girl read on;

a single ray of the bright March sun falling upon her white cap and open book, so as to throw into relief the exquisite outline of her delicate features.

On hearing her name pronounced by the united voices of the superioress and a stranger, the child instinctively and respectfully arose; and Emmanuel recognised at once not only the mild saintly expression of her poor mother's face, but an air of the distinction which seemed to place her as much apart as her studious occupation, from the noisy group of her companions in misfortune.

As he contemplated that face, fair and mild as moonlight, tears sprang into the eyes of Emmanuel; whose evident emotion would have provoked a suspicion in the mind of the superioress that the father of her little pupil was before her, but for the scanty years of him who took so deep an interest in Looisje.

"This child's holidays are sure to find her at her book!" observed the superioress, patting her encouragingly on the head; and Emmanuel rejoiced to perceive by the promptitude with

which the hand thus extended was seized and kissed by the little girl, that she was in the habit of receiving such caresses and such commendations.

Deeply affected, he had little attention to bestow on circumstantial details of the nature and purpose of the institution. All he understood was that most of the children before him were foundlings,—the offsprings of vice or poverty; removed thither from the adjoining establishment of the *Enfans Trouvés*.

“She is all we could desire,” wrote he, in the letter which conveyed to Bruges, the following day, the details of his visit; “gentle, lovely, intelligent; and being so placed as to enable you to contemplate her unsuspected, I will not indulge in the indignation excited by the breach of faith of her infamous father, in having rendered her the object of a public charity, instead of accomplishing his conditions with yourself. To remonstrate with him,—to acquaint him that his treachery and her place of concealment are discovered, would be perhaps to cause her instant removal, and thus lose sight of her for

ever. Let us be content, then, dearest Netja!—let us be content. Though the child you love be submitted to the rough schooling of adversity, let such be her portion for a time, rather than have her placed in some less accessible retreat.”

Never perhaps did more acute emotions contend in a human heart, than when, shortly afterwards, Emmanuel was required to escort the mother of Looisje to the *hospice*; and witness the mingled agony and joy of poor Netja, compelled to repress the yearnings of a mother’s joy as she contemplated her promising child. He admitted at once the utter extinction of the hopes he had still wildly cherished. He saw that the heart of Netja was full; that there was no place for the feelings he had persevered in hoping to excite! Consulted, as a patient friend,—a loving brother,—he rejoiced to find poor Netja so enlightened by her lessons of affliction, as to be content that her child should receive a modest and religious education among those of her own degree, rather than be an humble pensioner upon the bounty of her father.

“She is happy—she is contented,” said Netja, through her tears, as they quitted the *hospice* together.—“What more have I to desire except the impossible joy of pressing her to my heart, and glorying in the name of mother.”

“At some future time even this may reward your many sacrifices,” replied her companion. “A few years hence she may be withdrawn, to become the wife of a man who will restore her to her mother’s affections !”

“*Who* will marry the offspring of shame?” faltered poor Netja. “What man of honourable condition would accept a bride reared and nurtured in a public hospital?”

“One to whom her mother’s affections were denied !” replied Emmanuel, firmly. “When the time arrives, give her to me ! Make me indeed your son, and see whether I do not render her in return the happiest of wives and daughters.”

Netja replied by a desponding shake of the head. How was a woman so cruelly experienced in the fickleness and perfidy of mankind

to believe in the stability of these good intentions ?

Nevertheless, the happy prospects thus nobly held out have been fully realized. Within three years of that singular and providential discovery, Emmanuel Zoon, on obtaining a noble independence by the death of his father, enabled the mother of Looisje to claim her child from the Orphan House, and place her in the Ursuline convent of Bruges for the completion of her education in a style proportionate to the station of life for which she was now destined. For the Count de L——, who had, of course, represented her to the administration of the charity as fatherless, had not the smallest authority to interfere with their arrangements.

That the result has been more than satisfactory, is attested by the unalloyed domestic happiness of one of the worthiest families in Belgium. It was within view of the window from which Emmanuel made his first acquaintance with his gentle neighbour, and with two of his lovely children climbing on his knees,

that the romantic story of his marriage was related to me *by himself*. There was, however, some difficulty in believing that the venerable and excellent mother-in-law assisting in the regulation of his establishment, had even been an object of personal attachment to himself during her period of sorrow and probation as a CHILDLESS MOTHER.

FAMILY SECRETS,

BY AN OLD BACHELOR.

THOSE who visited Paris five-and-twenty years ago, may recall to mind a sapient humorist, known by the name of *L'Hermite de la Chaussée d'Antin*, who, from his secluded hermitage in the heart of that gay metropolis, exercised an inquisition into the peculiarities of his contemporaries. To this day, it is admitted that the domestic life of the times of Napoleon is nowhere so accurately portrayed as in the lucubrations of the Hermit.

Much such a commentator am I.—In the upper story of a commodious mansion of the parish of St. George, is my study, familiarly known by privileged visitors as the Blue Chamber, wherein I pass my merry life in laughing over the antics of the fashionable world below.

In the days of Molière, by the way, there was also a famous Blue Chamber,—*la Chambre Bleue* of the Hôtel de Rambouillet,—in which used to assemble the celebrated coterie satirized by the dramatic philosopher, under the name of *Les Précieuses Ridicules*.

People are apt to suppose that the designation “Blue,” applied to such of the gentler sex as dabble in literature originated in the epoch of Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Montague. Not a bit!—It is as old as those of *Menage* and *Madame de Sévigné*,—two of the habitual frequenters of the Marchioness de Rambouillet’s Blue Chamber! Blue has consequently been for the last two centuries the emblematical colour of the lettered tribe. Blue devils had probably the same origin. The spirits that minister to *my* Blue Chamber, however, are *couleur de rose*; and the feathers I pluck from their wings to depict the manners of the day, though many-hued as the plumage of a humming bird, rarely include among their evanescent tints the cerulean tinge of the pedant.

To paint with discretion the lighter follies of

the times, the artist must be a man of the world, yet, "dolphin-like, show above the element he moves in." Inquire of the sun, which receives my morning salutation full five minutes before its rays gild the adjoining balconies of Berkeley Square, whether I rise not considerably above and before my fashionable neighbours!

The first object I salute—after the sun,—on summer mornings, is my next door neighbour, Lord John Devereux, lounging home from Crockey's, with the pallid face of a waxwork figure that has weathered the vicissitudes of a show-life for the last thirty years; and from his manner of proceeding along the street,—whether tickling the flank of a fine cab-horse in his days of prosperity, or tapping the area-rail as he saunters along, with a jewel-headed cane nearly as valuable as the cab-horse, I can infer within a hundred guineas the amount of his winnings or losings. Lord John is one of my weather-gauges of the morals of the day. I love the lad almost as much as though he were a grandson of my own. I can comprehend, from the nature and number of the knocks at his door, the chief

incidents of his daily life. The single knocks perpetrated by wretches in brown, brass-buttoned coats and corduroys, or shabby-genteel nondescripts in seedy surtouts whereof the side pockets seem framed to contain compendious morocco pocket-books, have begun to fill my mind with anxiety in behalf of my young neighbour, since I discovered that these worthies are apt to emerge from his abode with faces the complexion of a gathering thunder-storm, and execrations "not loud but deep,"—and occasionally loud also:—just such, as are necessarily engendered between a visit to Crockey's overnight, and a visit with a single knock in the morning.

I can fully enter into the state of the case. Lord John is the third son of the Duke of Crawley, whose rent-roll of seventy thousand a-year was charged by his marriage-settlements with a provision of fifty thousand pounds for younger children. It was thought a handsome sum at the time; for the young Duchess, whose jointure those settlements purported to affix, had no dowry but her beauty; and there was a fero-

cious Duchess-dowager still extant, extracting eight thousand a-year from the estate. *Who* was to guess, moreover, that so silly a measure as a love-match on the part of one of the wealthiest peers of the realm, would create ten junior branches for the subdivision of the allotted sum into small packets of poison, amounting to five thousand pounds a-piece?

Lord John and his five luckless younger brothers, accordingly, were reared in purple and fine linen, on venison and providence-pines; without the slightest reason to infer that the future provision of each would not amount to the salary of their father's French cook. They rode their Shetland ponies, and figured in oil paintings in the Exhibition, arrayed in velvet and point-lace, in all the thoughtless vanity of childhood. Grooms, keepers, pages, tutors, and other menial servants, waited upon their beck; and they progressed in due season to Eton and the university, without having received an admonitory hint from their parents that it was their vital interest to attain there the means of their future advancement in life. The Duke

was too busy with his whist, and the Duchess with her toilet, to do more than hurry through an affectionate good-bye to them when they quitted the castle. Lord Edward, indeed, the one intended for a bishop, was occasionally reminded that he was tabooed for the Church, and must be more guarded than his brothers; but the rest of them, like other ill weeds, grew apace, and did little or nothing beside.

No one cared enough for the Duke of Crawley to remonstrate with him seriously concerning the destinies of his boys. For he was known to be averse to serious talking; and, though a kind-hearted man, lived on from day to day through a life of pleasure, without ever bringing it to mind that at his death his son the Marquis would succeed to Belmont Castle, and the rest of his handsome boys to comparative beggary.

“Ned is to be a parson; Willie to study the law, and represent the Crawley borough. Jack, Harry, and Orlando must go into the army, or do something or other, and we will see and push them on!” was his usual reply when his old tutor, the Irish Dean, or some inquisitive

country neighbour, presumed to question him respecting the training of his olive branches. His Grace trusted, in short, as men of less consequence too often trust, to the chapter of accidents, to provide for those who owed it to *him* that they were thrust into this world of debits and credits, to struggle and buffet with its necessities; and was consequently more at liberty to enjoy his hunting half the year, and his rubber the other. The annual cost of his kennel, had it been laid by for William, Jack, Harry, and Orlando, would of course have placed their future fortunes beyond all solicitude. But it is a hard thing for a Duke with so fine a rent-roll to deny himself the innocent recreation of a pack of hounds, or the ruinous hospitalities which form an inevitable appendix to the onerous item of aristocratic life; and thus, when his Grace descended in his Spanish mahogany shell and crimson velvet coffin to the society of his ancestors, the wide world became encumbered with a Lord William, a Lord Henry, a Lord Orlando, and a Lord John, of no mortal use to the community, or credit to their order.

The Reform Bill, meanwhile, had provided for the Crawley borough, which was to have provided for Lord William. Lord Henry was in a hussar regiment, the inevitable expenses of which exactly doubled his income. Lord Orlando was in the Guards, on the quick march for the Bench; while Lord John, my neighbour, who had been sent into the navy with his Milk-of-roses habits so strong upon him, that it was next to impossible he should cling to it as a profession, was what is called—on the *pavé*.

Impossible to see a finer young man;—tall, active, intelligent, yet refined and gentle in his manners—unless when roused by altercations with single knocks. Having quitted Eton for the Mediterranean at thirteen, he had more pretext than his brothers for deficiency of scholarship; and, in lieu of Latin and Greek, had at least picked up enough French, Italian, and Spanish, to make him talk the abominable English in vogue amongst the gabblers of the day. He was an accomplished musician too,—as the sound of a guitar and rich tenor, which reached me on summer mornings from

his open windows, sufficed to attest ; and, if I might trust to the record of his partnership accounts in the Morning Post, Almacks did not boast a more favoured waltzer than Lord John Devereux.

Here was a pretty fellow to attain, at twenty-one, the absolute command of five thousand pounds, and not a grain of discretion to turn it to account !—He regarded it as a year's income !—Compared with the measure of his enjoyments at Belmont Castle, it was scarcely so much. However, he *was* good enough to content himself with it ; and as Lord John had nearly attained his twenty-second year when he first attracted my notice, he was at that time hardly worth five hundred pounds in the world. Fortune sometimes favours the reckless ; and the chances of Crockford's are said to have quadrupled that modest modicum before the close of the season. Though what is popularly called “done up,” and melodramatically called “undone,” he was able to keep up the ball a little longer. He lived at free quarters the autumn and winter months, with his brother

the Duke's hunters and hounds, at Belmont Castle; and early in the spring, I had the delight of welcoming him back to his old lodgings, rejuvenized by country sports, and almost as brilliant as ever.

My heart was glad within me. My interest in him was as warm as it was unjustifiable; and heartily did I long to whisper in his ear with the still small voice of experience, "Be warned!—be wise!—beware! Take into your hands the light burthen of your fortunes, and weigh them warily, ere again you risk them against the bitterness of penury,—the shame of obligation. Youth, with health and a hundred a-year, may appear despicable in your eyes; but youth without them is a far more sorry heritage. Take courage. Fall back into your profession. The party in which your family is enrolled may resume its authority. Government patronage, if it find you in the path of honour, might do much for you; but if it must seek you out sinking under a load of debt and obloquy, not even the strongest prop it has to offer can restore to strength and

comeliness the deformity of a broken character !”

But how, from the aërial eminence of my Blue Chamber was I to whisper this into the ear of the joyous young man?—I soon saw how matters were going with him !—Every day, knowing cabs called to take him out to dinner ; and anything but knowing family coaches stopped at his door four hours afterwards, for the same purpose, on their way to different balls. Next morning, came footmen with letters, and pages with notes, before he had been more than three hours in bed ; while tailors and jewellers, hatters and bootmakers, bowed at his levee with a degree of assiduity that sufficed to prove the punctuality of his payments during the year for which his fortune had served as income. Everybody was not so well versed as I in the amount of his mother’s marriage settlements and his own fortune. The tailors and jewellers knew nothing of the sum total of his losses at play, or the diminution of his property ; the fair proprietors of the footmen and pages had no reason to imagine that their little perfumed

billets were addressed to a ruined man ; and as to the family coaches, they would not have stopped within three streets of his lodgings, had they entertained the most distant suspicion of the real state of the case.

It could not be expected that, when the truth began to be surmised, tailors, jewellers, and family coaches should be sufficiently philosophical to compassionate Lord John as the victim of an erroneous system,—a martyr to the grim ghost of extinct feodality, which, so far from contemplating the greatest happiness of the greatest number, seems bent upon making fools of the elder-born of the aristocracy, and knaves of the rest.

I had noticed so many traits of humanity and courtesy in this fine young man, that I shuddered at finding him about to be included in this grievous majority. I noticed his popularity among his young acquaintances, both lords and commons ; nay, I have seen the sweeper of an adjacent crossing stand and look after him with a benediction as long as he remained in sight ; while the blind beggar

stationed on a neighbouring door-step, abstained from striking up her monotonous plaint whenever *his* well-known step approached, as she did for less familiar passengers; for of *his* liberality she was pre-assured. Other excellences had reached my knowledge connected with the three-cornered billets and their pages (I mean the pages in dark green liveries), which, combined with the almost poetical grace of his manners and appearance, excited my sympathy to the utmost. If I had not known myself to be such a wretched old quiz, I swear I would have got put up at Crockford's, for the sole purpose of watching over the proceedings of Lord John.

It almost enraged me to think that his four sisters were married to wealthy peers, hereditary lawgivers, supporters of Church and State, and men of weight and consequence in the country; and that not one of them was at the trouble of extending an arm to preserve this luckless boy from destruction. There was his brother, Lord Edward, with three thousand a-year Church preferment and high ecclesiastical honours; but

he had a wife and children, and “therefore he could not come” to the succour of the falling man. Lord Orlando was with his regiment in India; Lord William making his court to a city widow; and Lord Henry compromising with his creditors. Not a soul among them with a thought or a guinea to waste upon their frail brother! I had even thoughts of inditing a private word or two to the proprietresses of the pages, to implore their intervention. But by rash interference, I might embroil the affairs of my young neighbour a million fold.

So passed the second year; and, now that we are entering the third, the result of my evil prognostications is fatally corroborative of their wisdom. The morning single knocks are now repeated with “damnable iteration.” Not a family coach for the last eight months! The cabs of opulent friends or kinsmen are few and far between; but, as infallible as the rising of the sun, the return of the prodigal at daylight, with sallow cheeks and seared eyes,—a gambler,—a losing gambler,—a gambler playing on

parole, and knowing that his word of honour was *once* sacred!—

I see how it is—I see plainly how it is.—I shall lose him.—The lad will come to a bad end. While his brother the Duke is paying thousands per annum to keep up his hunting establishment, and hundreds to his chaplain and *maître d'hôtel*, besides devoting a prodigious waste of prose to the harassment of government and its administrators; while Lord Edward is keeping residence at his deanery, and his noble brother-in-laws preaching in Parliament, not a word either of exhortation or reproof is addressed to the goodly creature thus gratuitously wrecked among the rocks and shoals of fashion, by a bad education, bad example, and the bad influences of conventional life.

There is a pretty little damsel leaning at this moment against the French windows of an opposite drawing-room, and apt to be on the watch there at this hour of the day,—actuated, I suspect, by the same anxieties as myself. It is Dora Colville, only daughter of the stiff-necked, pig-tailed old General to whom the house

belongs. Sir Felix is a widower, and on the committee of the United Service Club; for were there a Lady Colvile in the case, she would instruct poor Dora that it is an unbecoming thing for a pretty little face to be seen so often at the window, especially when living opposite to a handsome young man who, to speak it kindly, is a bit of a *roué*. But Dora would perhaps answer that she did not care. Dora is getting reckless on more subjects than one. In reply to such expostulations, she is apt to exclaim, with an air of pettishness—"Do let me have *one* agreeable moment in the course of the day!"—and it is plain she takes little pleasure in the company of young Rodenton (the only son of one of the richest landed proprietors of Yorkshire), whom Sir Felix picks up in St. James's Street, and brings home with him, at least three days in the week.

Two years ago, she bore patiently with Rodenton and his paltry self-conceit. But Dora is now eighteen instead of sixteen; and has acquired such mighty knowledge of the world as to be aware that a Duke's younger son, if

unportioned, is worse off than a commoner's younger son, from having a social position to maintain; and that her father has an especial motive for inviting Rodenton so often to his house. For the estates of Sir Felix are entailed. The rest of his income is derived from his pay and pensions; and his gout, by taking a wrong direction, may at any moment leave Dora an orphan, with a pittance of ten thousand pounds, the product of his savings. According to the code of fashionable morality, *who* can blame him, under such circumstances, for recalling frequently to mind the beauties and prosperities contained with a certain ring-fence at Rodenton Hall?—Besides, it is no fault of the old General's that his opposite neighbour has seen fit to let lodgings, and a handsome young spendthrift to engage them, season after season.

Dora is evidently getting almost as uneasy as myself; nay, she may perhaps entertain other cares on the subject than I do. Miss Colvile recognises the livery of those morning pages, just as two years ago she knew the armorial

bearings of the family coaches; and is consequently better versed in the *histoire galante* of the young scapegrace. She is getting almost as thin as Lord John. What *can* be the matter with her?—*She* has no pecuniary anxieties. *She* is distracted by no single knocks. The eight thousand a-year's worth of pleasure and prosperity she is annually enjoying, seems likely to last for ever; and, as Mrs. Lumley Rodenton, her enjoyments would be still more lavishly provided. Yet I doubt whether that charming girl enjoys a happy moment! I doubt whether—but, after all, what business is it of mine? Is it not a hard thing for a respectable old bachelor like myself to be disturbed in my Blue Chamber by the vagaries of two young people, no more connected with my sympathies than Shem, Hem, or Japhet!

It used to delight my old eyes, two seasons ago, to see Dora Colvile start up from her work-table encumbered with silks and Berlin patterns, or her drawing-desk scattered with pencils, when some itinerant band came through the streets, and, by its barbarous murder of

one of Strauss's or Labitsky's popular waltzes, tempt the light-hearted creature into spinning round the room, threading the maze of fancy chairs and littered tables, with a grace and agility that Elssler might have envied! And now, I verily believe Jullien himself might pipe the *Paradis-Vogel* under her window by the hour together, without attracting her attention! I scarcely ever see her at her piano. The harp has not been out of its case this fortnight past. There she sits, poring hour after hour over the embroidery frame; and I verily believe stitching blue roses and pea-green lilies. Sometimes, I see her raise her pretty little slender white hand to her eyes, as if dashing away some obstacle that prevented her seeing very clearly;—more particularly whenever she happens to hear the General's well-known knock. At that signal, indeed, I have known her suddenly place both hands for a moment over her eyes, or press them upon her bosom, without rising from her chair. She seems on such occasions to entertain an intuitive dread that her father is not alone,—that young Ro-

denton is with him, in all the weary monotony of his everlasting smiles,—his curls parted to a hair at the same spot for the last three years,—and his conversation diluted down to the same standard of wishy-washy insipidity. I am certain, too, that the silly fellow torments her with idle reports concerning the follies and vices of her opposite neighbour. Rodenton has a certain manner of standing at the window and surveying the modest two-windowed lodgings of Lord John Devereux with all the insolent prosperity of the son and heir of thirty thousand a-year, a park in Yorkshire, and a mansion in St James's Square. I can detect the smile that curls his lip as he pursues his conversation with the General's daughter, while reporting progress of the General's opposite neighbour,—the shrug, the grimace, the sneer of contempt. While Dora raises her blue eyes from her work and utters a word or two, doubtless in extenuation,—for I have observed Sir Felix break out thereupon into a rage, and saw the air with his hand, in attestation of every ill-natured word uttered by his intended son-in-law.

Yet surely it is only natural that Dora should do her utmost in vindication of her opposite neighbour ! For I remember that scarcely a day passed, two years ago, but the Morning Post coupled together, in describing the balls of the season, the names of Miss Colvile and Lord John Devereux, as all but one and indivisible. She was then a timid *débutante* ; and Sir Felix seemed to think that a fashionable young man,—a Lord John,—a capital *valseur*,—might be available as a sort of pedestal to bring her into notice ; and though he has lately issued his word of command that she is to be as cool to the ruined spendthrift as can be effected without absolute rudeness,—that is, rudeness so marked as to provoke in return the imperiousness of his four fine-lady sisters, who, in spite of their deuce of a brother, are still court-cards in the pack of society,—it is not so easy for a warm-hearted natural girl like Dora Colvile to fling aside her early predilections, and become as stiff and heartless as one of the heroines of Madame Tussaud.

It would be a much easier thing and a much kinder, on the part of the old General to exert his interest with the Admiralty,—(where one of his Scotch cousins rules the lady with the tin helmet and shield, who swears she rules the waves),—and get the poor lad an appointment. He would be much better in the Mediterranean again, or at Fernando Po, or Bogotà,—no matter where,—to be out of the range of Crockford's and the blue eyes of Dora Colville. But the General is a man of very limited perceptions. He only hears with one ear. The sight of one eye was destroyed at Waterloo; and I shrewdly suspect that he perceives only with a single organ of discernment. His one idea is to marry Dora to Rodenton Park. He does not consider the means,—he contemplates the end. Sir Felix Colville spends half his life in reading the newspapers, and the other half in talking about them—more intent upon his duties as a committeeman at the United Service than the business of his domestic life; and evidently thinks that, having introduced James Lumley Rodenton, Esq. M.P., to his daughter a suitor, the young

gentleman will gradually progress into her husband; just as, having planted his saplings at Colvile Lodge, they are sure to progress into trees. He cannot be always on the spot watching whether the rain rains; any more than whether pretty little Dora smiles and blushes in due season upon the promising prig with the well-parted curls, who laughs so exultingly upon occasion of a reduplication of single knocks at the door of Lord John. With all his pretended apathy, however, the General is in general pretty well up to snuff,—and his snuff is of the right Irish quality. The dexterity with which he continues to keep out of sight a certain Reverend Olinthus Colvile, who is to succeed to his family estates, is beyond belief. Though only two years the junior of Sir Felix, this country cousin is as weak in health as intellect; and Sir Felix, in his alarm lest the old gentleman should be tempted to drivel in the coffee-room of Slaughter's or the Bedford (where, lodging at the Hummums, he would naturally satisfy his parsonic appetite with tough steaks and tougher port, on his annual visits to the

metropolis to watch the progress of a tithe-suit), insists upon affording him both board and lodging; and contrives to keep him so hermetically sealed during his sojourn in town, that nothing but tithe-proctors come within ear-shot of the heir in tail. As an excuse for inviting no company in his honour, the crafty General manages that himself or his confidential butler shall be suffering from the influenza: which, as the Reverend Olinthus is sure to come in March (*like* the influenza), for the advantage of the oratorios, is easily accomplished. It is amazing with what good faith the worthy parson has swallowed the said influenza for the last eleven years! — But if Dora should remain single another season, my mind misgives me that her father will be obliged to vary the scene next spring with a quinsy or a fit of the gout.

The result of this curious fraternal manœuvre is, that, with the uninformed, Dora Colville passes for an heiress! Without entering into details of family estates or thousands a year, the fashionable world regards her as what is vulgarly called “a catch.” Prudential mammas are en-

chanted to see her dancing with their younger sons ; and find no fault even with their eldest for seeking her as a partner. "Old Colvile's only daughter," is a password for pretty little Dora into the bosom of even the most worldly-wise families.

It is a strange thing, by the way, considering the jactant vanity of modern society,—the manner in which people display the knowledge and accomplishments they possess, and boast of those they do not possess,—that every one is careful to keep out of sight their remarkable proficiency in the Wisdom called Worldly,—the only wisdom of which the *principia* are posterior to the lessons of Solomon !—For nothing can be clearer to eyes profane, than that by its code, alone, are regulated the morals and manners of associated May Fair.

In the year five of the Railway Era (for really in such matters one ought to adopt a new system of chronology),—in the year five of the Railway Era, the learned pundits of modern London began to perceive that the days of Latin and Greek were gone by ; and that, leaving

the universities to their classics, and the classics to their universities, it was high time to institute a course of practical education for practical men.

Up rose, accordingly, the College of Civil Engineers, and one foresees the time when our great-grandsons, instead of learning to trail their sabres along the pavement of country-towns as cornets of dragoons, or wear out their souls and bodies in the fretfulness of compelled patience while waiting for a curacy, will become academically endowed with the powers of constructing Menai bridges from Dover to Calais, or constructing an Eddystone lighthouse in the centre of the Bay of Biscay O! The wise projectors of this truly national institution not only descried one of the wants created by the progress of the times, but found subscribers ready to afford the means (at the rate of so much per cent) of supplying the deficiency.

Now, if, instead of a college, some philanthropists would only afford to the colleges already extant, a professorship of Worldly Wisdom, surely it would be indescribably more respectable

for the rising youth of Britain to derive their principles in the new science, from some sharp-witted gentleman in spectacles than from their parents and guardians !

For my part (but I am a twaddling old soul !) I cannot understand how a Christian father has courage to look his son in the face, after indicating to him the process of political jobbery; first, as candidate for the suffrages of the people, and next, as candidate for the confidence of an administration. Still less can I comprehend how a Christian mother ventures to accompany her pure-minded daughter on Sunday mornings into the edifice whose steeple of Portland stone riseth into the fog within view of my Blue Chamber, after inculcating on Saturday nights at the opera, the system of policy current among the match-catchers of the season ! After such lessons, it appears to me that the fifth commandment becomes the most trying of the decalogue. To "Honour your father and your mother," after your father and mother have deliberately suggested habits of moral petty larceny such as might render filial piety a

difficult virtue to Æneas or the Grecian Daughter, ought to be considered the *acme* of modern virtue.

I have seen Dora Colvile's cheeks flush to a carnation tinge, after a long closeting with the General. Though a kind-hearted, excellent girl, I am convinced that his paternal admonitions have sometimes hardened her heart towards him to the consistence of Regan's or Goneril's!—

“ You may dance to-night with Lord Charles—the Marquis has had a paralytic stroke!” or “ I insist upon it that Clarence Hamilton is not seen in your box to-night. I find that Sir Graham Hamilton's estates are entailed on his brother!” are precepts which neither grey hair nor the reverend lips of old, can divest of their odiousness.

Were such a professorial chair instituted as I have described, no abler tactician could be found to fill the same than Lieutenant-General Sir Felix Colvile;—evidence whereof might be adduced in the eagerness testified by half the mammas of his acquaintance to become chaperon to the supposititious heiress whom

they would have scouted with her mere ten thousand pounds. Even Lady Catherine Rodenton, the stately parent of James Lumley, is almost as assiduous in her courtship of Dora, as her son ; having fixed her eye upon certain additions to the Yorkshire estates of the family, which she fancies might be easily secured by exchange, were the Colville property amalgamated with their own.

The passion of Jemmy Rodenton for the fair daughter of Sir Felix was, in fact, originally a dove-chick of his provident mother's hatching. The rising young man fancied himself desperately in love ; because the oracle from whence his ideas and opinions were derived, assured him that he was so. Lady Catherine had so gravely informed him, when a boy, he was a staunch Tory, that he believed himself one, after he became a man. Nay more, unwilling to annoy her by denial whenever she assured her guests at Rodenton that from November till April he was never happy out of the saddle, Jemmy, without a particle of taste for field-sports, was in a fair way to live and

die the life and death of a fox-hunting squire, like his father before him; and had it become her wish for any possible reason, either as tending to secure his political interests, or his position in the *coteries* of fashionable life, to make him believe himself a *fanatico per la musica*, a connoisseur, or geologist, or sea-horse, three or four days at the utmost would have sufficed to secure his conviction! Lady Catherine Colvile was, in short, admirably matched against Sir Felix Colvile,—diamond cut diamond,—arsenic *versus* prussic acid. Each had to deal with a submissive child. But Jemmy's obedience emanated from softness of head; Dora's from softness of heart; and it is a bad look-out when the strength of the parent consists in the weakness of the child.

“*On peut être plus fin qu'un autre, mais pas plus fin que tous les autres,*” says a shrewd Frenchman. With all Sir Felix Colvile's worldly wisdom,—all his care in secluding poor Olinthus, as though he brought with him from his parsonage the infection of small-pox,—and all his advice to his family-lawyer to be as close

as wax in the discussion of his affairs,—the real obstacle to the much-desired alliance between Dora and James Lumley Rodenton never occurred to his mind! By getting Lord John Devereux appointed to a ship, he might have relieved the Hall of Eblis in St. James's Street from an unprofitable customer, and the wealthy squireling from the real stumbling-block in his matrimonial path. But, as I said before, my Blue Chamber lies in too stilted an elevation to admit of my whispering advice into the ears of my neighbours.

Were I nearer on a level with them, there are others besides the cunning old General and improvident young sailor, whom I should like to admonish!—There is a flashy young fellow, who occupies a suite of state apartments at the Grand Hotel next door but one to Sir Felix Colvile's, who stands as low in my estimation as he seems to stand high in his own. The single spot of earth where he has a right to stand high—the counting-house of the city firm in which he is senior partner,—is the only one wherein he never deigns to make his

appearance. Perhaps, because the Lane in which it is situated is too narrow to admit his drag, and that to reach any distant point of the metropolis otherwise than four-in-hand, is out of the question. His father, honest man, used to make *his* way to his house of business, first with a cotton umbrella under his arm, and lastly in a buggy ; a profitable modesty of conveyance, which caused the house itself to make its way in the world till the acting partner had bequeathed half a million to his family !

Half a million !—If a young fellow, inheriting half a million, in addition to good health and spirits, be not a happy man, the deuce is in it,—or in *him* ! To be sure, the half-million is the thing likeliest on earth to teach him to get rid of his health and spirits, unless the health and spirits teach him to get rid of his half-million ; which three things have a remarkable incompatibility for dwelling together in unity.

Mr. St. Chads has got rid of a considerable portion of all three ;—thereby reducing himself to mediocrity, and obtaining nothing in return

save the delight of being called "Leo" by those whom the newspapers call "the leading fashionables;" whereas, had he stuck to the city, he might still have been called only Leonard, like his father before him.

When I admit that a portion of the said half-million has disappeared in the shape of loans, and another portion in the shape of losses, I shall perhaps be thought ungenerous in protesting that St. Chads, whether Leonard or Leo, is incapable of a generous action. He has lent money, indeed,—but to whom? To his poor relations?—To his humble friends?—To needy tradesmen?—To struggling artists? By no manner of means! To his *proud* friends—to out-at-elbow lords, and fashionable foreigners! He has thrown out sops, in the shape of thousand-pound notes, to the Cerberus of fashion. He has purchased his *entrées* into the forbidden precincts of *ton*, at the cost of ten thousand guineas an inch! His losses are not, like those of his firm, in unprofitable speculations in hides and tallow, but at hazard or roulette; and his first step on quitting Ox-

ford was into an exclusive club, where he was only borne with on due attestation that he had been pigeoned in less reputable quarters to the amount of eighty thousand pounds! Upon the faith of that pigeoning, he first came to be called “LEO”—*leo* by name, and *leo* by nature; for he was the lion of that sporting season,—the green-horn at Epsom,—the Johnny Raw of Ascot,—the sufferer at Doncaster and Newmarket!—By the following spring, he had every right to be called “Leo, my boy!” by all the best fellows about town.

How fond they were of him! How they used to come and breakfast on his woodcock pies,—taste his liqueurs at luncheon time,—and dine with him either in his showy apartment or at the Clarendon! He supplied himself with Havannahs on a scale almost as gigantic as the speculations of his hide and tallow concern, exclusively for their benefit;—and Pontet’s books can attest the cwt. after cwt. of carotte and macouba, of which dandies having coronets on their cabs, were friendly enough to lighten his canisters. He had a box

at the Olympic and a box at the Opera, in which (so obliging were his friends in making use of his tickets), there was seldom room for him to show his nose, unless on benefit nights ; and though Leo would have seen one of his St. Chad's country cousins at Greenock before he had the goodnature to oblige *him* with a lift into any place of public resort, he seemed to have it earnestly at heart that all the junior branches of the aristocracy should be duly accommodated with advantageous places for seeing the ballet.

I never was gratified with a view of Leo's banker's book. I am only the Hermit of the Blue Chamber. I write myself neither honourable, nor *attaché* to some foreign embassy ; and am, consequently, without pretensions to the notice of a millionaire lord-hunter. But I know from sufficient authority that the chief items of the same, with the exception of such startling entries as " Jan. 8, to Self, £24,000," —(for St. Chads is too vulgar a fellow not to delight in paying his hotel bill,—from the Boniface who rides a bit of blood worth three

hundred guineas, to the smallest waiter of the establishment, who rides nothing but a clothes' horse,—his tailor, trowserer, jeweller, stationer, shirt-milliner, clear-starcher, &c. &c. &c. from hand to hand, for the personal enjoyment of their gratitude and obeisances),—the chief items, I say, consist of “To BEARER, two hundred guineas,”—“To BEARER, five hundred guineas,”—“To BEARER, one thousand pounds,” and so forth. When this was first related to me, the innocence of my soul suggested that the said BEARERS might be treasurers of public charities, or secretaries of national institutions. But the head of my informant was sarcastically shaken, as with a significant smile he informed me that—by an appropriate Orientalism,—these BEARERS were all TIGERS; the two-hundred-guinea-tiger wearing a noble crest on his button,—the tiger £500, the coronet of a Marquis;—and that concerning the thousand pound tiger, the less said, the better!—These neat little sums were, in short, so many baits with which Leo had been setting his lord-trap.

Toadies, as a genus, are an object of very

general contempt; but the world, that wholesale dealer, has no leisure to make distinctions between toady and toady.—Now there are toadies who, unskilled by education to become governesses or tutors, and unfitted by birth to sink into butlers or ladies' maids, are converted perforce of starvation into hangers-on upon great or wealthy personages afflicted with a weakness for having their ears tickled.

Such toadies are objects of compassion rather than scorn. "They cannot dig, to beg they are ashamed;" and the ostentatious of this world have hitherto omitted to set aside a portion of their superabundance (duly advertising the same in the morning-papers), for the maintenance of the self-respect of the shabby genteel.

But the Toady Gratuitous,—the Toady Wanton,—the Toady who toadies in the abjectness of his soul,—the Toady, who with his golden spurred heel tramples on the Humble while performing Ko-Too to the Proud, is a dirtier fellow than we care to mention in these pages.

Others beside myself entertain the same opinion. The Marquises and Honourables, whose friendship costs the presumptuous St. Chads pretty nearly the same annual sum as his hunting-kennel costs the Duke of Crawley, indulge freely in grimaces and gestures concerning their dear Leo whenever his back is turned ; of which, had I not craved interpretation of a lamplighter in my neighbourhood with whom I keep up a running acquaintance, the meaning might have been still hieroglyphical in my sight. I now perfectly comprehend their purport to be, "Hides and tallow, thou art a very sorry creature !"—"Sarves him right !" (as the Cornish jury returned it,)—"sarves him perfectly right." Whatever be the measure of *their* ingratitude, *he* is only punished as he deserves.

It is a great gratification to my feelings that I have never once detected my favourite, Lord John, at Leo's levee. They are acquainted. Not to the point of slang salutations or insolent pantomime. But I am convinced that it is the cool tone in which my young neighbour exclaims, "How are you, St. Chads ? as Leo passes

him on the box of his drag, which reduces the *parvenu* to the painful necessity of replying, "Good morning, Lord John!" instead of "How do, Jack?" as he would be entitled, did the tiger of Dora Colville's idol bear to Lombard Street those missives signed "Leonard St. Chads (private account)," which unite him in the holy bonds of toadyism with the raffish portion of the aristocracy. Yet Leo would gladly purchase an *entrée* to Belmont Castle by the loan, in such a case infallibly a gift, of ten thousand pounds. By condescending to the shabbiness of certain of his titled brethren, Lord John might consequently disencumber himself of his embarrassments, and become free to re-enter his profession,—encumber himself with a ship,—*almost* with a wife! But I know him!—The lad is incapable of such degradation!—Dora is right!—Lord John Devereux will go on saying,—“Good morning, *Mr.* St. Chads” to the end of the chapter.

Within these few days, however, I have noticed the lord-feeder growing gradually as grumpy as the nondescripts in seedy coats who knock at

the door of Lord John. At first, I was amazingly puzzled what could ail him. Stocks were up,—hides and tallow “brisk.” What could be the matter with the monied man of fashion ?

But this was not all. I discerned in the countenances of the admirably got-up specimens of Human Nature who lounge in at breakfast to the woodcock pies, and mount the roof of the drag in the afternoon for a party to Lovegrove’s with “that capital fellow Leo,” a scarcely repressed smile of delight,—a twinkling of triumph in the eye,—a certain saucy elevation of the head as they extended their fore-fingers in salutation. What can be the casualty which has caused the corners of Leo’s mouth to curve downwards, and those of his satellites to curl upwards, like a crescent moon reversed in the several cases ?

Alas ! “Murder will out ;” that is, “LOVE and murder will out !” Leo has actually presumed upon one of his ukases, “Pay to BEARER two thousand pounds,” to throw himself at the feet of BEARER’s lovely sister, Lady Olivia ; and the haughty Lady Olivia has sent him back to the city, like his cheque, with a very unplea-

sant hint in his ear,—conveying the assurance of her amazement, or rather, her amazement at his assurance. BEARER protests that it was Lady Olivia who whispered the startling circumstance to her intimates; whereas, Lady Olivia was too dignifiedly indignant to utter a syllable about the matter. On the contrary, Leo himself, in his first petulant resentment, betrayed his mortification to her brother,—and her brother has no padlock for his empty head, any more than for his empty strong-box. And thus, the Crockfordites are looking grave at Leo, to prevent their laughing too broadly in his face; while Leo pretends to laugh in the faces of the Crockfordites, to prevent their perceiving his ill-humour. The farce is kept up among them with a degree of forced gaiety and clumsy art, worthy the boards of one of the patent theatres.

Now Leo has conceived a plan of singular revenge. Among the younger sons refused by Sir Felix Colvile for his supposed heiress last season, was the very “BEARER” whose necessities and meannesses are the origin of this nefarious im-

broglia ; and at that time, Leo would sooner have walked down St. James's Street arm-in-arm with one of his uncles, than condescend to matrimony with the child of an ancient baronet, general officer, K.C.B. and so forth. As regards their personal qualities, Dora or Olivia were perfectly immaterial in the scale. But his option lay between a *Lady* Olivia and a *Miss* Colvile, and he did not hesitate. It was impossible to stand the notion of a mere "*Mrs.*" St. Chads. They could not call *her* "*Leo,*"—she *must* be a mere common-place respectable "*Mrs.* St. Chads."

But a Miss Colvile, by whom BEARER had been rejected, and for whom Lord John Devereux, (the Lord John who chose to remain Lord John Devereux to Mr. Leonard St. Chads), was supposed to entertain a hopeless attachment, is becoming a person of some consequence,—of sufficient consequence, indeed, to determine him to the humiliation of a courtship.

I doubt, however, whether Leo is likely to fare better with little Dora than with Lady Olivia ; or with the General, than his daughter.

St. Chads seems to have forgotten that the half a million of money which was to render him acceptable in the great world has been gradually melting away in fees to the door-keepers thereof; and that he has scarcely twelve thousand a-year left in the world. Now twelve thousand a-year, arising out of a Lane in Lothbury, has very little chance, in the estimation of a professor of worldly wisdom, against a rent-roll of thirty thousand, emanating from one of the prettiest estates in the Three Ridings!

But though I have no fear of seeing the modest, gentle Dora transferred to the driving-seat of Leo, I can understand that the shattered nerves of poor Lord John will not be placed more at ease by finding any addition to the pretendants to her hand. *He* has not the shadow of a chance; he must be aware that he has not the shadow of a chance.

But so long as she looks so pretty, when springing upon her bay mare every day to accompany the General into the Park; and so long as her slight salutations to her old partner are accompanied by glances more in sorrow

than in anger, it is but natural he should curse his adverse fortunes, while he admits that all the happiness he is ever likely to enjoy in this world is through the panes of his drawing-room windows! (If I did not scorn to play on words, the occasion is propitious).

Lady Catherine Rodenton, meanwhile, is working herself up into a state of nervous excitement at what she regards as a most vexatious traverse to the projects of her son. Nothing can stand more widely apart from the country-gentleman world, than the section of society which performs its mummeries and morris-dances round such Jacks in the Green as St. Chads. It is, perhaps, in consequence of this estrangement that mutual jealousy and mutual deference are entertained between them. The country-gentleman interest, whose rents are usually in arrear, and who are consequently in want of ready money to enable them to construct quays, roads, or bridges, — to sink shafts, and erect steam-engines, — build churches for the parish, or wings for their family mansion,

“to enable it to fly away with the estate,”—are apt to view with uncommon reverence those who twice in every year, as sure as the sun crosses the equator, receive in the dividend office, in Threadneedle Street, moneys in hard coin of the realm, such as they would mortgage a considerable portion of their farms to carry off in their pockets. Lady Catherine, having vaguely heard the word million connected with a vulgar fellow of the name of Leonard St. Chads, has ever since regarded him as a sort of golden calf, an image resembling that set up by Nebuchadnezzar, for the squirearchy to fall down and worship. She has never heard of either his lendings or his spendings; and probably conceives that the annual savings of the said millions have been put out at compound interest, till he has grown as rich as Demidoff or the ex-King of Holland. She believes Leo to be the ass whose stables are stalled with varnished mahogany, and whose boot-jack is of virgin gold; and has little hope that even Rodenton Hall and its old oaks will stand their ground against the charm of riches,

enabling a woman to outshine her fair contemporaries no less by the brilliancy of her entertainments and equipages, than by personal attractions. It is perhaps as a sort of counter-balance to the mischief, that her Ladyship appeared the other day at the drawing-room in the full blaze of her family diamonds. On the strength of their effulgence, she seemed to rise in her own estimation cubits above the stature of a house of business in a Lane the width of her gravel-walk ; which, if it wanted diamonds for the wife of its senior partner, must go and buy them on Ludgate Hill. *New* diamonds and *new* point-lace are non-existent in the ideas of a Duchess, and matters of consequent contempt in the estimation of a squire's lady. Lady Catherine, whose necklace formed a part of the endowments of the Lady Castlemaine, and whose old point figured on the shoulders of the renowned Lady Yarmouth, soon after the accession of the House of Hanover, would feel as though she were on the treadmill, if arrayed in ornaments purchased in the year of Railways 5, with money emanating

from a counting-house in Crooked Lane! She has too much respect for her future daughter-in-law, not to attribute to her what the French call the same distinguished sentiments. Little Dora, however, may chance to be of a different opinion. Time will show!

ST. CECILIA.

LET no enthusiastic reader anticipate, from the imposing title of this story, a memoir of the melodious saint to whom we are indebted for the invention of the only musical instrument worthy to be dedicated to the worship of the Supreme Being ; and whom the world, with its usual gratitude, rewarded with the agonies of martyrdom. The Roman matron, who was boiled, by command of the Prefect Almacus, like Fontenelle's asparagus—" *tout à l'huile ; tout à l'huile ;*" has been commemorated by worthier pens and pencils ; and never more exquisitely, perhaps, than by our own Sir Joshua, in the celebrated picture of St. Cecilia at the organ, for which the beautiful Mrs. Sheridan served as model ; a chef-d'œuvre still surviving to exhibit a life-like

resemblance to one of her no less beautiful grand-daughters:

This is a long preamble—too much, alas, resembling the flourishes of histrionic trumpets, that usher in the performances of some infant prodigy; or the Eastern cry, so ludicrous to the ears of a Frank,—“in the name of the Prophet, FIGS!” For, after all, these grandiloquent allusions to St. Cecilia, to Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the gifted authoress of the “Dream,” we are forced to confess that the heroine of our tale is neither more nor less than A CANARY BIRD!

The inhabitants of the Low Countries, whether Dutch or Flemish, like most people of sedentary habits and unincidental lives, have always been remarkable for manias and enthusiasms, the enjoyment of which is not of a nature to disturb the even tenour of their days. The want of extensive and picturesque landscape in their native land suggested the careful cultivation of flower-gardens; a pursuit peculiarly favoured by the early activity of the Dutch in maritime adventure and colonization,—the fruits and flowers of tropical countries being introduced

by the Batavians into the north of Europe, almost as soon as they reached the south, through the traders of the Levant. They were also among the first to introduce into our aviaries that favourite bird, the canary, now naturalized as European;—perhaps because, (according to the proverb that “*on n’est jamais prophète dans son pays*,” more cherished among ourselves, than by the aborigines of Ferro and Teneriffe.

But it is still among the Dutch and Flemish that these little warblers retain their greatest popularity. Canaries are to be found all over the world, from New York to St. Petersburg, wherever the population is sufficiently luxurious to admit of the entertainment of pets; and, when you see a cage appended to a distant window in any town or city in Europe, the chances are ten to one in favour of its containing a canary. But Germany delights equally in piping bullfinches, and America in Virginian nightingales; while the abominable parrot tribe is in wondrous favour with the old maids of England, and the dowagers of France; whereas, in the Low

Countries, the canary is, and was, and shall be, the Phoenix of the land. Like the tulip, its inanimate rival in Dutch affections, it is not only an object of predilection, but, from having been specifically cultivated, has become an article of trade; and the fancy-prices given for Dutch tulips and canaries, would suffice to keep up the taste for their creation, for export to foreign countries, even were the preference extinct.

For a well-bred, well-taught canary, a sum amounting to fifteen, or even twenty guineas, is often given by the rich amateurs of the north; and those who admire the canary in its cage, forming so frequent an accessory in the pictures of Ostade, Mieris, Gerard Dow, and Netscher, little surmise that the original cost of such a bird has often exceeded the original cost of such a picture! In the Flemish school of art, indeed, there exists the advantage, that these domestic pictures of one, or even two centuries ago, may be accepted as valid samples of national manners at the present day. A very slight variation in the costume of burgomasters and their wives by Rubens and Van Dyke, would convert them

into fac-similes of the grave, hard, matter-of-fact men and women in authority, of the present day; and those cold and stately interiors of Flemish churches, with their ghastly alternation of black and white marble, and a few devotees in sable cloaks, wandering along the aisles, as in a region of perpetual frost, (one of which is indispensable to complete every picture-gallery that respects itself,) might have been painted to-day or yesterday, as much as the interior of some highland cabin by Landseer. The monotony of occupation, the vulgarity of pursuit—the materialism of nature impressed upon the productions of all untravelled Flemish painters, is still exemplified in Belgium at every step. The taste of Rubens and of Van Dyke was formed or rather reformed by Italy, and their fortunes prospered by England.—But the painters of familiar life, who pourtrayed only what they saw in unidealized truth, have circulated through Europe the story of the nation as thoroughly as Hogarth has immortalized, in his brilliant satires, the vices of fashionable London, of a century ago.—*Mais revenons à nos serins !*

The words, "well-bred, and well-taught," canary, have not been unadvisedly used; for if Rouen have its college for the education of poodles, where those intelligent members of the community study hard for a degree, are crammed by a private tutor, and finally leave college with a certificate of good morals and proficiency, as indispensable to *their* future settlement in life, as among ourselves, a Mastership of Arts, to the future archdeacon or dean; a dozen Dutch and Belgian cities of renown have their academies for the instruction of canaries, somewhat resembling the *conservatoire* in Paris, or Lord Westmoreland's no less important Academy of Music, in London. To provide suitable pupils for these schools of art, societies have been instituted, which give premiums for the production of handsome, and clear-throated canaries; silver medals to the rich, and sums of money to the poor: and a shapely, long-bodied, well complexioned canary, is honoured with as rich a prize in Belgium, as an air-plant (that requires a hundred a-year in fuel and guardianship for

its maintenance) in wiser London. While they suffer their national literature, such as it is, (yet, still the only literature open to the people) to sink stifled in the muddy Helicon of their native canals, the Flemings bestow their utmost cost and care on the rearing of a canary-bird!

Of these societies, one of the most flourishing, is the Society of St. Cecilia of Alost; the half-yearly meetings of which, and the distribution of its premiums, are as gravely announced by the metropolitan newspapers, as the distribution of prizes for Hamburgh grapes, and Providence pines, by the Horticultural, are tantalizingly set forth by the Morning Post. The Barmeudes feast occasionally placed before whose readers, in the sultry dog-days, by that Hafiz-ian offset of the Belles Lettres, scarcely causing the mouths of the rising generation to water with more greedy coveting, than the descriptions contained in the "Emancipation" or "Independant" of Brussels, of the prize canaries; "*serins jaunes*," or *serins émaillés*," honoured with their grand medals by the learned society of St. Cecilia.

And why not? No one can guess how such associations may end! Our own Zoological was expressly instituted for the purpose of improving the breed of domestic animals in Great Britain; an achievement which it accomplishes by the cherishing of lions, wolves, and boa-constrictors; and it may, perhaps, occur that the harmonious sons of St. Cecilia of Alost, who pretend, at present, to nothing further than the production of yellow or enamelled canary-birds, may end with bringing forward a human tenor,—a Rubini, or a Duprez. It cannot be that the sainted organist hymned by John Dryden and Alexander Pope, should restrict her benign protection to the perfectibility of the *canarie vogel*.

Meanwhile, the said association modestly contents itself with the realization of its promises, and the fulfilment of its duties, undertaken, by presenting ten, twenty, thirty florins, as the case may be, to the owner of the handsomest cock-canary; if in a condition of life to hold cheap the possessing of a shining medal in a velvet-lined morocco case, and to prove

the said victorious bird to have been bred by a fellow of the Society of St. Cecilia; in Alost, the initials F.S.C., being almost as creditable as those of F.R.S. among our more sapient selves. It is probable that, were the phlegmatic Flemings a betting nation, the follies of Newmarket would be emulated among them by odds offered and taken on the produce of such and such a brood, for the year 1846. Meanwhile, I know an instance, in which still more important consequences were staked upon the breeding-stock of a fellow of the Society of St. Cecilia.

It was at the close of a bright autumnal Sunday, just fresh enough to make the population which had been enjoying out-door pleasures and pastimes since morning, recollect, with satisfaction, that they had snug homes to return to for the night, that a young day-sempstress of Alost, Rose Jansens, by name, was sauntering back to her lodgings, on the arm of the young man by whom she had been escorted early in the afternoon to the public gardens of the *Dry Kroonen*, half-a-mile

rom the city, that they might enjoy together the waltzing and mark-shooting there provided for their humble class of life.

Almost all the other parties pursuing the same road homewards, were trudging briskly along, in order to ward off the influence of the chilly evening after their exertions. But Rose and her lover walked as leisurely as though it had been midsummer; exhibiting no other consciousness of the cold of a September twilight, than was to be inferred from a somewhat closer hooking together of the arm, as they approached their place of destination. For, alas! the other parties knew that they were proceeding homewards to enjoy in common their evening meal, within four cosy walls, by a cheerful light; while Rose, was only too sadly aware that her good-bye to Julius—the good-bye of a long, long, workman's week—must be spoken on the threshold of her lodgings, if she wished to retain the excellent reputation she enjoyed in the difficult and equivocal situation of a journeywoman sempstress living alone and on her means.

Both evidently wished to make the most of a walk, constituting one of their fifty-two hours of pleasure in the year.

“I am almost sorry I did not bring my cloak instead of this summer shawl,” observed Rose, pressing a little closer to the side of her plighted lover, yet not even affecting to quicken her pace; “the evening air is sharp as Christmas.”

“Yes; winter is drawing on again,” replied her companion, in a tone of depression very different from the joyous accents in which he had announced to his pretty partner half-an-hour before, his triumph as a crossbowman. “Winter is drawing on again, Roosje, and I see no more chance of our spending it together, than I did this very time last year; when we both foolishly fancied that six months was to end our troubles; and that, instead of these cruel weekly meetings, or rather cruel weekly partings, we were to begin life together hand-in-hand: not a luxurious life, Roosje—not an idle one. But, God knows we should feel the cares and labours to which we were born, a thousandfold lighter,

were they borne in common; eh! darling Roosje?"

The young workwoman replied by a responsive movement to the tender pressure of the arm with which these endearing words were accompanied; on the strength of which encouragement, the young lover proceeded.

"It is now two years since you lost your poor mother, Roosje; your dear good mother, under whose sanction our words were plighted, or I should not be where I am in your confidence and affection. She knew me to be poor, poor as yourselves, but industrious as yourselves; and saw me doubly industrious, so long as the additional pittance earned by my extra labour served to procure her a few comforts during her long illness. Never shall I forget the kindly looks she used to bend upon me, when I brought her some poor token of kindness; an orange for her feverish mouth; a flower to freshen her bed, when she was even past all enjoyment of the palate. 'You are a right good soul, Julius,' she used to whisper (when you fancied she had drawn down my head

towards her pillow only to bestow her benediction or a kiss of motherly affection) ‘and I see that it will be well with the child my soul loveth, when she shall be your wife, and her mother cold in the grave.’ ”

A new pressure of the arm—and this time, an unsolicited one, rewarded these avowals of tenderness.

“And when she was gone,” resumed Julius, “and we had honoured her memory by placing a black cross over her head, setting forth that she had died in the fear of God, and the love of his creatures, I was in hopes, Roosje dearest, that the next employment for the earnings of my leisure hours, would be to pay for our wedding dinner!—I thought we should see the summer leaves come out, as man and wife;—that by this time,—but why do I revert to all this?” cried he, checking himself, and swallowing, with a great effort, the tears that were beginning to render his voice somewhat hoarse and broken.—“My disappointment is no fault of yours, Roosje; you have done all that a faithful girl could do, towards fulfilling the

engagements made to me by your poor mother. You have worked as hard as myself,—you have lived as frugally as myself. While other maidens of Alost are bright with gay colours, or warm with autumn stuffs, the thin gown you are wearing—(how well do I remember it, before the long sad year of mourning which marked your respect towards the memory of your mother!)—the gown you wear, I say, is white at the seams in the sunshine, with much use.—I loved you all the better for its shabbiness, dearest, when I saw you stand opposite to me, with such a cheerful contented face, in the dance, among those who were more gaily and splendidly attired.—For by that content, I saw that it was for me alone you danced and dressed,—seeing that, assured of my admiration, be your seeming what it might, the sneers of your companions had no effect upon your mind! But neither your parsimony nor mine avails us aught; and we seem to be far as ever from the event which would forestal the necessity for my taking leave of you, as in a few minutes I am about to do, to return to my solitary

home—nay, worse than solitary,—for I declare to you, Roosje, that so long as my uncle persists in his opposition to our marriage, he is no more to my regard, than if no drop of my father's blood were flowing in his veins."

This was as strong a declaration of antipathy as was compatible with the mild nature of Julius van Iseghen ;—for he was a young man of kindly nature, who desired no better than to go through life with hard labour for his portion, and human affection for his reward,—happy, and happy-making,—living, and letting live.—Even to his selfish, stingy uncle, he had been the best-intentioned of nephews, till the old gentleman took it into his head to declare that, on the most remote hint of marriage, he would disavow and disinherit him,—that it must be either no wife, or no uncle !

The man by whom this crabbed denunciation had been held forth, was a dry, spare, reserved old bachelor,—a native of Alost, who, after fifty years' absence, had returned there at the bewildering epoch of the revolution of 1830 ; from which time, till the present, he had never taken

kinsman or neighbour sufficiently into his confidence, to acquaint them through what mysterious source of prosperity, the lad who left them previously to the first French revolution, without a doit in his pouch, had returned, after the second, an old gentleman of substance. It was rumoured,—*faintly* rumoured,—that during a considerable portion of the said half century, Erasmus Van Iseghen had officiated as professor to one of the colleges of Paris,—some said of dancing,—some of mathematics;—and that, at the outbreak of a revolutionary storm, little in accordance with his principles, whether of algebra or *flic-flacs*, he had sent in his resignation, and sneaked back to his native place, to enjoy his *otium cum dignitate* in furnished lodgings over a grocer's shop, in the marketplace of Alost.—Whatever the secret motive of his unexpected return, the one he avowed was plausible enough;—*viz.*, to behold the only son of his only brother,—his next of kin,—his natural heir;—who, having been left unprovided for by his parents, was pushing his way in the world, as the hard-

working journeyman of a provincial cabinet-maker.

True to the line of conduct he had chalked out for himself, old Erasmus affected the greatest joy on finding a nephew restored to his arms, concerning whom, from the moment of his birth, he had never troubled himself to make a single inquiry ; immediately assigning to Julius a small chamber under the same roof, (and literally under the roof), with his own ; excusing himself from the liberality of adding board to lodging, on the plea that, having no servants, he was himself obliged to eat at the neighbouring café. From the day of his nephew's arrival, the old gentleman had, in part, contracted for his own maintenance at the table d'hôte of this establishment, for a yearly sum, such as no well-thinking old maid in England would assign for the keep of her cat ; and there was, of course, no reason for making a similar arrangement in favour of Julius ; who, having lived at his own expense previously to his uncle's arrival, could not do better than adhere to his early habits.—Nevertheless, slight as was the

gratuity thus vouchsafed by the prim old gentleman, he seemed to fancy that it not only exposed him to a charge of nepotism, but entitled him to become the arbiter of his nephew's destinies, so far as to break off his foolish engagement with a penniless sempstress. The old bachelor announced that "he had other views for him," with an air of majesty, such as would have become the Duc de Bourbon, when, as guardian of the youthful sovereign, Louis XV., he broke the peace of Europe, by sending back, in scorn, to Madrid, the affianced Infanta of Spain !

Poor Julius submitted, or rather *appeared* to submit, because Rose Jansens insisted that he should not hastily oppose the only living relative whom Providence vouchsafed to either of them ; entreating him to trust to time to mollify the obduracy of the great man who possessed a drawer full of silver snuff-boxes, and (according to report) a strong box full of silver crowns. It was only natural, she assured him, that so opulent a relative should be difficult in his choice of a partner for life for his future representative.

But Julius, whose heart was a land overflowing with milk and honey, thought it a hard case ; arguing with unworldly logic that, since the mother of Rose Jansens, poor as she was, had received *him* with open arms,—how much more warmly ought Rose to be welcomed to those of a kinsman so excellently well to do in the world !

So far, however, from exhibiting a humane disposition towards either of them, Erasmus (who, the first week of his acquaintance with his nephew, had intimated a desire that Julius should renounce his mechanical calling, and an intention to look out for some better opening for his fortunes) no sooner heard of Rose Jansens and her claims, than he decided that the young man could not do better than stick to the trade of a cabinet-maker ; and that he had enough to thank his stars for, in not being a mere carpenter. But towards what object on earth did Uncle Erasmus evince greater humanity ? Not even himself,—for however rich in the means and appliances of comfort, he preferred living in a furnished lodging to se-

curing a decent roof tree of his own, lest he should be preyed upon by his only surviving relation !—

No one could see the Heer van Iseghen emerge from his solitary chamber for an evening-walk on a summer's afternoon, after due digestion of his wretched dinner, carefully locking after him the door of the fusty lodgings which served as his treasury,—his nankeen gaiters (long obsolete, at Alost as elsewhere) hanging loosely round the shrunken shank that did so little honour to its speckled stocking,—his gold-rimmed spectacles defyingly adjusted on his thin nose, and his gold-headed cane grasped firmly in his hand, as much as to say, "I am part proprietor of the sunshine and pleasantness of the earth, and let me see who dare attempt to chouse me out of my inheritance,"—without perceiving the sordid egotism of the man ; and that he only allowed himself to enjoy the summer atmosphere and verdure, because they cost him nothing.—His beaver gloves were things of a year's conservation.—His hat, on the brushing of which he expended ten minutes

previously to starting, though shapely enough at a distance, proved, on a nearer inspection, to be altogether napless.—His linen was yellow from age and cheap washing;—his broadcloth white from weather wear.—Wherever his angular frame was prominent, his garments had acquired patches of glossiness like the polish bestowed by certain modern sculptors on portions of their statues,—and in the few movables of his own which had accompanied him into his lodgings, similar proof of thriftiness was perceptible. His trunks were of deal,—his chests of paper,—his standish of lead,—his pipe of boxwood.—The only two things pertaining to him, in any degree accordant with his reputation as a man of property, were a mahogany box or desk clamped with brass, and secured with a patent key which inhabited the waistcoat-pocket nearest the heart of the old bachelor,—and a handsome brass-wired breeding cage for canaries!—Yes!—all the sympathies and domestic tendernesses of that apparently passionless idiosyncrasy, were centred in a breeding cage of canaries!—

This was the more extraordinary, because, on his arrival at Alost a year and a half before, the cage had accompanied him,—empty. It was no predilection attaching itself to certain favourite birds,—remembrances of other years. It was the result of a sort of malice—aforethought—determination to come to Alost, torment his nephew, and become a member of the Society of St. Cecilia. Who knows?—Perhaps, with the singular national *vaterlaendische* propensities, of which even a Belgian is susceptible, one of the remembered charms of his native town delighting his soul in exile, might have been its seriniferous peculiarities;—and by the waters of some afar off country he might have sat down and wept, when he remembered the bird-cages of Alost!—

Certain it was that within three days of his arrival, after half a century's absence, Erasmus had become a St. Cecilian; the cage being utilized and enlivened by the occupancy of a pair of canaries, yellow as buttercups,—their taper bodies, like their notes, “in witching sweetness long drawn out.” The old gentleman, to

whom those first three days in his native Sparta had appeared a century (so mopingly did he wander up and down the dreary streets, not a face or a name in which is familiar to him), had now settled himself to his heart's content. Erasmus was become a family man!—Like the Persian poet, he had “come to the place of his birth, and exclaimed, ‘The friends of my youth, where are they?’ till Echo answered, ‘Where?’—But now, he had ceased to ask idle questions of Echo,—and, had she for once attempted an original observation, and asked questions in her turn,—would have pointed to his breeding cage, and answered ‘THERE!’ like Cornelia showing off her living jewels.”

But alas!—according to the influence proverbially said to surround bachelor's wives, the domestic joys of Erasmus van Iseghen were not fated to prosper. Though he had fully expected to increase and multiply his canary birds through this Adam and Eve of his new world, so as to fill an aviary with their posterity, the happy couple were still the childless monarchs of their Paradise.—From the very day of their

arrival at Erasmus's lodgings, in a couple of paper bags, which he carried jingling in his hand, he had assumed all the fussiness of paternity; and the first thing the poor little hen canary perceived, on emerging from her bag, was bed as well as board provided for her,—a nest as well as a trough of tempting glossy seed.—Condemned, without alternative, to the cares and interests of matronhood, like the bride of a crown-prince, till she became a mother, she was nothing;—for would not the necks of hen canaries be twisted as remorselessly as those of the daughters of the Indian Rajahs, but for their virtues of incubation?—

What joy, meanwhile, for the withered old gentleman, when he first beheld his little prisoner fidgeting on the border of her nest, with a straw in her mouth; and in process of time discovered within its soft, downy circle, a tiny egg, not quite so large, but almost as precious, as Cleopatra's pearl. Instantly closing the window-shutters of the corner of the room dedicated to the breeding cage, he set about studying the comfort and caprices of the mother

of his future family, like some superannuated peer, foreseeing, in his dotage from a tardy alliance, the birth of a son and heir!—No trouble was too great for the origin of the charming fledgeling,—the young canary yellow as “one entire, and perfect chrysolite,”—which was to secure to him the much coveted honours of the St. Cecilian medal.

For that the very first produce of his cage would secure one, he never doubted!—What could be more certain, according to the established laws of nature, than that the offspring of the handsomest pair of canaries in Alost would be a prodigy?—In furtherance, therefore, of the object of his wishes,—in order to reconcile to the duties of the nest the pretty coquette Gagatte, whose care of her plumage, and occasional pickings with her saucy spouse, inspired him with no great respect for her principles as a wife and mother,—the old gentleman, who usually contented himself by way of walk with picking his steps daintily along the pavement of the streets, on dry afternoons, literally went to the cost of a

cotton umbrella on the next market-day, in order to hazard a walk into the country, in search of the fresh chickweed and groundsel he was too stingy to purchase ;—the umbrella being a permanent acquisition,—an heirloom for the family ;—while the cost expended to purchase weeds for Gagatte's cage, would be lost to him and his heirs for ever.—Every afternoon did he adorn the wires with a verdant arbour (like the triumphal arch of some royal entrée), the produce of his harvest ;—and every morning insert between them a morsel of double refined sugar, for a small portion of which in every pound of the brown spongy substance with which he was in the habit of sweetening his coffee, he bargained with the complaisant grocer, his landlord. For, lo! a second and third egg had increased his household treasures ; and already he was beginning to speculate on the second prize of twenty florins, in addition to the silver medal.

It was just at this moment of excitement, that Julius, whom he had recognised as a kinsman, soon after the instalment of his rivals,

the canary-birds, unluckily saw fit to communicate his matrimonial projects,—the result of which avowal has already been explained—and by some unaccountable process of reasoning peculiar to angry parents and indignant guardians, it was to his quarrel with his nephew, on occasion of Rose Jansens, that old Erasmus chose to attribute his disappointment and mortification, when the following morning, having been roused from his sleep earlier than usual by a domestic fretting between Gagatte and her spouse, he found, on rising to ascertain the cause of their disagreements, the eggs broken by the heedlessness or malice of the young mother: no more chance of the medal of St. Cecilia, than of a crown and sceptre!

At that moment, but that Madame Gagatte had cost him her weight in florins, he would have brought her to an untimely end. But Rose Jansens was a gratuitous object of vengeance, and he accordingly vented his spite by lavishing ugly names upon the poor sempstress, the next time she was mentioned to him by his nephew.

It was a stormy moment in the household; a moment of severe family affliction. But "Hope springs eternal in the human breast;" and since the season was by no means too far advanced for a second brood, Erasmus, instead of making manifest his wrath against his canaries, renewed his attempts at making the agreeable to them, in hopes of restoring peace to the cage.

His hypocritical efforts were crowned with success; at the end of a week, Julius had reason to infer, from the pacified voice in which his uncle bade him 'good-morrow,' every-day ere he proceeded to his work, that the domestic prospects of the young couple under the green baize cover, were again brightening; and on this occasion, the old gentleman rendered timid by disappointment, was twenty times more fussy than at first. But, alas, all his anxieties were in vain, his hopes were again destined to frustration; and as on the present occasion, it was a thunderstorm which addled the eggs, there was not even the poor comfort of expending his

ire in abuse of Gagatte ; though it was certainly enough to provoke a greater saint than the sinner Erasmus, to observe the glee of the unmotherly little creature, released from the ennui of incubation, as she hopped fluttering and joyous about the cage, as if she had a gratuitous right and title to its airy dome, and to the fresh chickweed with which it was garnished.

The season was now so far advanced, that little chance remained, even with the certainty of a third nest, of its produce attaining the wished for medal ; and, as old Erasmus cared no more for the song of his canaries than though they had been a couple of crows, there was some excuse for his fretfulness on counting over, florin by florin, the fruitless outlay by which he had endeavoured to conquer the object of his Flemish ambition. As if, however, to discredit his accusations, Gagatte, in a moment of fine-lady caprice, took it into her head to sit a third time, and a third time regained her place in the esteem of her master.

The day on which Julius van Iseghen discovered, by a most tremendous explosion of wrath in his uncle's sitting-room, that within two days of the expected brood, the unprincipled infanticide had been found perched on the seed trough at early morn, her eggs having been left all night to grow cool above, (as Julius considered it might be now advisable to leave the old gentleman) he saw that the hopes of a happy termination to his year were at an end. For sooth to say, it had cheered him through many a hard day's work, to surmise the possibility of softening the old bachelor's heart in favour of Rose Jansens, on the day of his winning the premium of St. Cecilia.

Such was the state of affairs to which he was now reverting; and, though poor Rose as they approached nearer to her humble lodging in Cuypers Street, began to suggest in solace of his increasing depression, that in four months the breeding season would recommence, and the humour of the old canary-fancier become less acrid than at the present moment, there was no gainsaying her lover's observation,

that it would probably bring a mere renewal of disappointments.

“ My uncle, Erasmus, gave too long a price for Gagatte,” said he, “ to make a new purchase ; and handsome as she is, (the best built *serine* in Alost), I am convinced her temper is bad ; and that she will never bring up a brood. Through her, my uncle has no more chance of a canary prize, than I of the archbishopric of Malines !”

“ If the poor bird could but guess what an extent of human happiness is dependant upon her steadiness !” faltered Rose, with a deep sigh ; and, by the time they reached her door, and their hands were enclasped, to be torn apart for another week’s estrangement, both were in tears.

It was but a few Sundays afterwards,—the trees having been stripped of their leaves, in the interim, by an early frost, and every vestige of flower and nosegay disappeared from the market-place,—that Julius van Iseghen, on presenting himself at the church-door, after vespers, to propose his usual Sunday afternoon-

walk to Roosje, exhibited a most gladdened aspect of countenance.

“I have a project,—a happy, happy project, darling Rose!” said he. “I feel as if I could not tell it you here, with so many people around us, to notice how my heart is overflowing. But when we get to the banks of the Druder, where we shall catch as much of the afternoon’s sun as elsewhere, and be more alone, I will tell you my secret.”

When, however, the river side was reached, and the secret told, to the great mortification of Julius, it did not suffice to brighten the countenance of Rose, as it had done his own.

“I have often mentioned,” said he, “my conviction that Gagatte is one of the worst brood-hens in Flanders. Like other beauties, she seems to consider herself above the duties of her condition; and it was only this morning I witnessed a fight between her and her mate, in which she caused the feathers of the poor bird, which had been carolling to her since daybreak, in a manner delightful to hear, to fly about the cage as though a bed were shaken in the room.

Now, this badness of disposition, dearest, instantly recalled to my mind the gentleness of your poor mother's old Cocotte, which I have heard you say has been known to bring up five broods in a year, and who used to come and dine at the table with us, when I was so happy as to share the meals of your house."

"Poor Cocotte!" echoed Rose. "She was always as one of the family. But that it was thus, and that my poor mother treasured her, I should not have kept her, having so little time to attend to her cage, before I go out to my day's work,—(our Alost ladies are so early, that if I ring at their door five minutes after seven, I am chidden!)—Think how lonely the poor bird must be, all day long, in my deserted chamber, without a soul to chirrup to her,—she that led so happy a life, while her poor old mistress was still about!—and, when I return at evening, her head is under her wing.—She would be happier, poor thing, almost any where, than in my keeping!"

"In that case, I have the less hesitation in

begging her of you for my uncle !" cried Julius.

"*For your uncle ?*" repeated the astonished girl. "A poor shapeless thing, with every second feather a white one, originally bought in the street for a couple of groschen,—to offer to the most determined canary fancier in Alost?—You must be joking !"

"I trust, dearest, the gift may lead to many jokes. Cocotte is the best sitter in Flanders. Since your poor mother's death, she has led so moping a life in her solitary cage, that you are beginning to forget her good qualities !"

"Her only quality to me is having been the pet of my mother !"

"Which need not, surely, be any obstacle to her bringing up a prize-brood for my uncle? Nothing would be easier than to remove her own eggs, the hatching of which is of no value, and place under her those of my uncle's prize-birds."

"You will think me very foolish," said Rose Jansens, after a very long pause, that appeared somewhat puzzling to her companion ; "but I

cannot bear to think of that bird, the only thing that remains to me of my poor mother, going into the care of your uncle!—You know very well in what vile terms the Herr van Iseghen spoke of *her*,—you know what a hard interested heart is in his bosom. Were he suddenly to fancy that Cocotte was not worth care or keep, as a bird of no intrinsic value, he would make no more scruple to wring her neck, than he did to vilify two innocent women, who never offended *him*, or any other living being!—Do not be angry,—but I *could* not part with Cocotte to your uncle!”

It was now the turn of the lover to remain silent; and bitter were the feelings of mortification accompanying that unusual pause. With the accustomed injustice of a lover, he kept secretly saying to himself, “And I, who fancied she loved me!—this woman, who would sacrifice our utmost prospects of happiness to the well-being of a canary bird!” Nor did an audible word again escape his lips, previously to the sad, but not surly “Good night, Rose Jansen!” which, at the close of their walk, intimated

that ill-will had, for the first time, arisen between them.

The following Sunday, when Rose emerged as usual from Vespers, there was, luckily, a sprinkling of rain as some apology for the absence of him whom, till now, not even the smartest shower had deterred from attendance ; and all the ensuing week did the poor work girl, between the pauses of her hemmings and sewings, and whippings, and bastings, cogitate within herself, whether it were really the weather which had caused the absence of her affianced, or whether his displeasure were serious ; till, at the mere surmise, her heart swelled within her, and her sight grew so misty, that the stitches of the seam she was sewing, became uneven as a row of hedge-stakes. And then, she was scolded by her employers : and then, she wept the more ;—*not* in repentance of her carelessness,—but because she thought it hard the first rebukes she had ever merited in her calling, should be produced by the unkindness of Julius ! At the close of her day's work, however, when

on going home, she proceeded to draw her window curtains for the night, her resolution became strengthened on beholding poor meally-coated Cocotte—the dear good homely bird, asleep with her head under her unmolested wing, and remembering how, during her mother's last illness, it used to hop upon the bed on the summons of its mistress, and cheer the pillow of the sufferer. If there existed any drawback to this puissant claim, it abided in a dark figure, which, as she drew the curtains, she sometimes noticed on the opposite side of the street; and found little difficulty in fancying the exact resemblance of a cabinet maker's apprentice.

This state of things could not be of long continuance between two people of hearts so true!—By Christmas time, Julius had proposed a medium measure, in which the workwoman thankfully acquiesced.—Its nature, let the sequel explain;—premising only that Cocotte, and her rusty cage disappeared suddenly from the dreary lodgings of Rose Jansens.

Her disappearance there was no one to notice. The workwoman was too poor to be much an object of interest to her neighbours ; nor did any one but Erasmus himself take much heed of a disappearance that occurred some weeks later in the house of Herr van Iseghen, when, just as he was congratulating himself on a new nest, and a couple of eggs in it to tax the improving matronliness of Gagatte, he woke one cruel morning, to discover that they were gone ! — Yes, gone,—removed,—STOLEN !—not broken, — not pecked, — not addled as before,—but subtracted,—for he was at the trouble of sifting the sand at the bottom of the cage through a lawn sieve ; and not a vestige of broken eggshell was to be detected ! It was a hard matter for the grocer and his wife to prevail upon the sour old gentleman not to call in the aid of the police, for the discovery of the delinquent ; and what provoked him most of all was, that when he recounted his misfortune at the café, where he enjoyed his daily meals and dominos, every body present listened with a smile !—There was but one

consolation.—The day after the commission of this enormity, Gagatte not only laid a third egg; but took to sitting upon it with patient assiduity, as if resolved to baffle all future attempts at the kidnapping of her incipient offspring. In due time, her reformation prospered.—A promising fledgeling made its appearance; and the triumphant joy of the old bachelor, F.C.S., on finding himself the father of a canary, may readily be conjectured.

He now scarcely quitted the house; as if afraid that, during his absence, evil might overtake his beloved progeny.—As the soft down and brighter plumage came forth, his anxieties grew almost painful.—If this scion of the matchless pair so highly reputed in Alost should prove unworthy of its race!—If the malice of the Fates, hitherto so triumphant against him, should convert his young hopeful into a poor sallow-complexioned hump-backed thing, like the myriads of canaries disgracing the obscure aviaries of humbler mortals!—If, after all, it should prove a *Racine fils*—a Richard Cromwell?

Every day brought new cares for the ambitious man. The young *serin* was doubtless a handsome and promising bird ; but having foolishly appealed to the grocer and his wife, and one or two domino-playing neighbours, concerning its aptitude for the medal, opinions were divided ;—his landlord, desirous to conciliate his customers, having replied that it was the finest bird of its months in Alost ; the others, predicting for it, at best, the premium of five and twenty francs ;—a conjecture which set the blood of old Erasmus, in a ferment.

So occupied was he by his perplexities, that he did not so much as notice the altered deportment of his nephew ; or perceive that every morning Julius descended the staircase from his attic, outsing the tuneful mate of Gagatte, who was now again upon the nest ; for the nearer the day approached for the half-yearly distribution of the prizes of the St. Cecilian Society, and the crosser grew the old gentleman, the happier appeared the work-girl and the nephew.

The momentous day dawned upon Alost ;

and it was in one of the smaller rooms of the ground floor of its town-hall, that the Society was to assemble; the Bourgmeister himself being a canary-fancier, and president of the association. An hour or two before the interesting opening of the meeting, servants were seen directing their steps thitherward from various directions, bearing carefully-covered cages in their hands, to be placed in rivalry upon the long table open to the inspection of the Society, and the public at large. A general twittering was beginning to be audible in the room; where a few of the feathered competitors, who had been wisely installed by their owners at an earlier hour, had so far recovered their self-possession in the strange place, as to swell their little throats in proof that their merits were not confined to outward show, and that in some instances, "*ramage vaut mieux que plumage.*"

But it was by no hireling hand that Erasmus van Iseghen, despatched to the town-hall, *his* pretender to the crown. It had gone sorely against him to be forced to purchase a small

neat cage calculated to do honour to the young bird; and he would fain have introduced his whole stock as complacently to the Society, as some Bloomsbury lady exhibits her ten blooming olive-branches in an aulic-box at Astley's. But this was unprecedented; and by his own hand was the aspirant conveyed to the spot, and judiciously placed in the line of yellow canaries, opposite to the row of *serins émaillés*.

The room being already crowded with competitors, "parents and guardians" of the exhibited, all proud and loquacious, as mammas at a dancing school, it was soothing to his jealous ears, to catch the approbative exclamations elicited by the uncovering of his cage. The bird was pronounced to be a beauty; though in tones less enthusiastic than were acceptable to the owner.

For though Erasmus van Iseghen had felt sure and certain of the grand prize, so long as he surveyed the produce of Gagatte, in his own dull senseless little chamber, now, in the fuller light of day, and in comparison with other half-yearlings like itself, he was forced

to admit that its supremacy was doubtful ! The long coveted medal seemed to recede from his view, as cruelly as when standing beside the rifled nest of Gagatte !

It remained no longer doubtful, however, the moment that the uncovering of a beautiful cage of *palissandre encrusté*, (evidently the property of the burgomaster, or some other rich man of the city), gave to view a pair of canaries, such as never before or since rejoiced the eyes of the seventeen provinces ! They were *not* birds !—they were gems,—they were treasures,—they were the work of some jeweller, after a pattern of the perfectibility of the canary, rather than the produce of a breeding cage !

A murmur of delight ran through the room ; and all present crowded towards the beautiful cage, with the exception of Erasmus van Iseghen ; who, having caught a glimpse of the exquisite birds, was content to hide his diminished head behind the rest.

But while general exclamations of astonishment, intermingled with questions concerning the ownership of the matchless pair, became

audible on all sides, the irritated old gentleman found himself plucked by the sleeve by the pretty young woman who had deposited the cage upon the table; and, lo! a note was placed in his hands to the following purport, which the gold rimmed spectacles, already bestriding his nose for the examination of the rival cages, soon enabled him to decypher:

“I beseech my dear uncle, to forgive my having robbed the careless Gagatte of her eggs, to place them under the surest brooder in Alost. The matchless pair of canaries before him, is the progeny of his own favourite birds; the cage, the work and offering of his devoted nephew and niece.

“JULIUS AND ROSE VAN ISEGHEM.”

There was no leisure for displeasure at the news so startlingly conveyed by the concluding line of this momentous despatch! At that moment, the testy gentleman's heart was glad within him. Besides, the burgomaster, escorted by his family, was entering the room; and by a

spontaneous impulse of generosity, all present called upon the man in authority not to decide or adjudge, but to admire with enthusiasm the most unexceptionable pair of canaries on the perch between the church-steeple of Alost and the Peak of Teneriffe. It was with difficulty that, after the half hour devoted to patient scrutiny and a ballot, silence could be obtained, so as to render audible the adjudgment of the prizes, which ran as follows :—

- 1st. To the finest yellow male canary, pre-eminent both for colour and shape, belonging to the Herr van Iseghen, the grand silver-gilt medal of the Society of St. Cecilia.—*Cheers.*
- 2nd. To the finest, yellow, female canary, matching with the former, the premium of thirty florins,—*Cheers.*

And, lo ! while the prizes, conceded to the *serins et serines émaillés*, were in process of distribution, and, after these, the premiums of twenty, ten and five florins, to yellow canaries of great though minor merit, Erasmus was

forced to admit how great would have been his mortification, had his claims rested upon the beauties of Gagatte's home-nursed offspring, upon which the judges did not deign to bestow so much as a word of approbation ; while, as it was, he found himself an object of envy to the whole room—the great man of the moment,—the Cæsar of the breeding cage !

Before he left the meeting, a sum in florins, equal to five-and-twenty guineas of our own money, had been offered him for his unequalled pair of canaries. And for all this pride and glory, and the lucrative prospects superinduced, he was indebted to Julius and Rose van Iseghen. How was it possible, therefore, to hold out in animosity against them ?—more especially when he discovered that his nephew had actually deprived himself of rest and food, in order to obtain materials and time for the manufacture of the inlaid cage, unrivalled as the birds, which all Alost agreed to be fit only for the palace of the King of the Belgians.

No !—the obdurate man had only to retract ! He was even forced to hire of the grocer two

additional rooms for the shelter of the young couple; and open the brass-clamped box, in order to provide them with a wedding banquet. Their own industry soon supplied the rest. But either this unusual recourse to his treasury inspired Erasmus with a taste for expenditure, or the extraordinary and most profitable increase of his breeding-stock, suggested the necessity of having a home of his own; for, before the next meeting of the Society of St. Cecilia, the uncle and nephew were installed in a comfortable house in the suburbs of Alost, having a little garden containing a smoking house and aviary; for which Julius worked none the less willingly to produce the furniture, that the whole was eventually to become his own.

The finest canary-birds now sold in Flanders, are the produce of the van Iseghen stock. Yet not the most precious of them all—not the fortunate bird now in progress of tuition to become the pet of the greatest lady in Europe—is half so valuable in the eyes of Roosje, as the poor, old, meally, shapeless Cocotte, still hanging, and in a handsome new cage, beside

the work-table, where she has the happiness of cutting out the handsomest silk dresses and cardinals worn in Alost. The old bird has become lame of a claw ; but Julius has contrived a low perch, of peculiar construction, to favour its infirmity.

“It was my mother’s favourite bird,” said the Vrowe van Iseghen, in reply to my exclamations of surprise at seeing so mean-looking a specimen, in such a spot. “It was the origin of all our happiness !”

And she forthwith told me, in more glowing words, the story I have attempted to relate.

“If I could venture to describe to you the cause which originally inspired my uncle with his mania for prize canaries,” added her husband, to whom she appealed for confirmation of her tale, “you would admit that, great as are our obligations to poor Cocotte, it was no ordinary caprice that connected the happiness of his life and ours, with the prizes of the Society of St. Cecilia !”

Shall I go on? Certainly not, just now.—
But at some future time, with the good leave of
my readers, I may perhaps repeat the invitation
of “*Revenons à nos serins !*”

THE END.

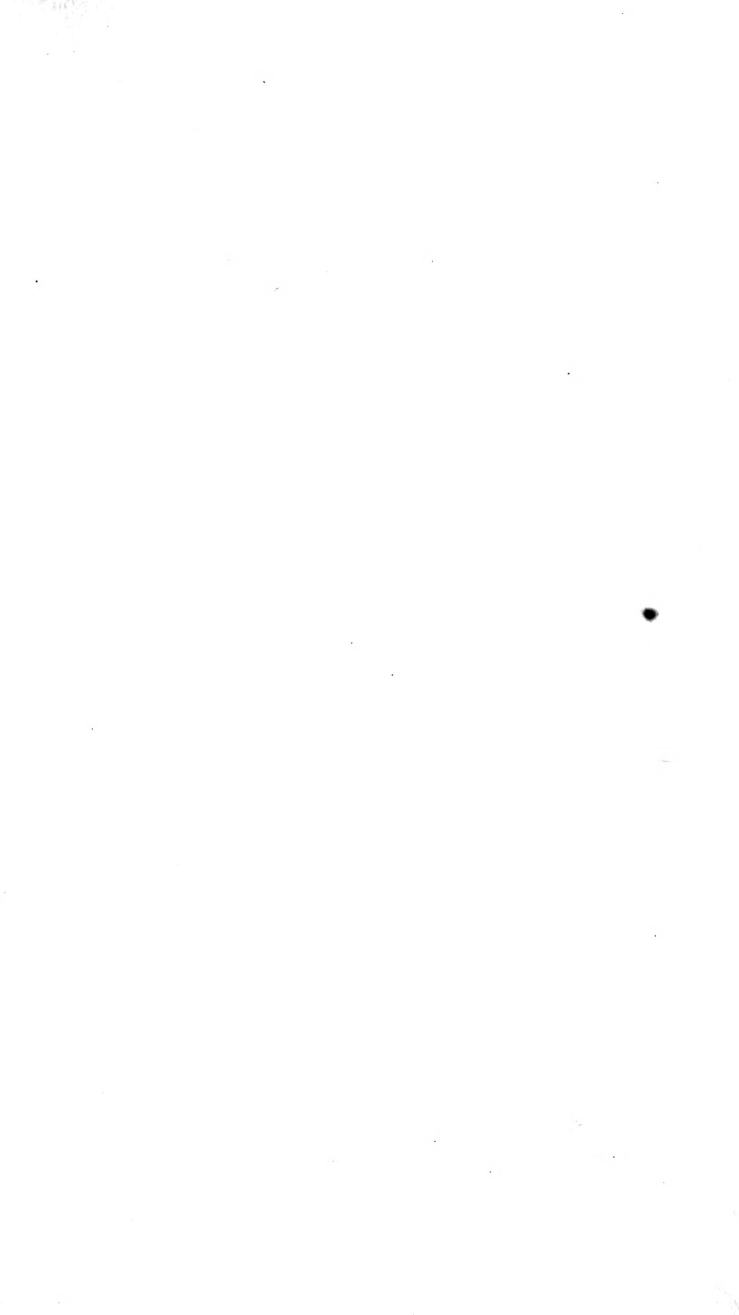
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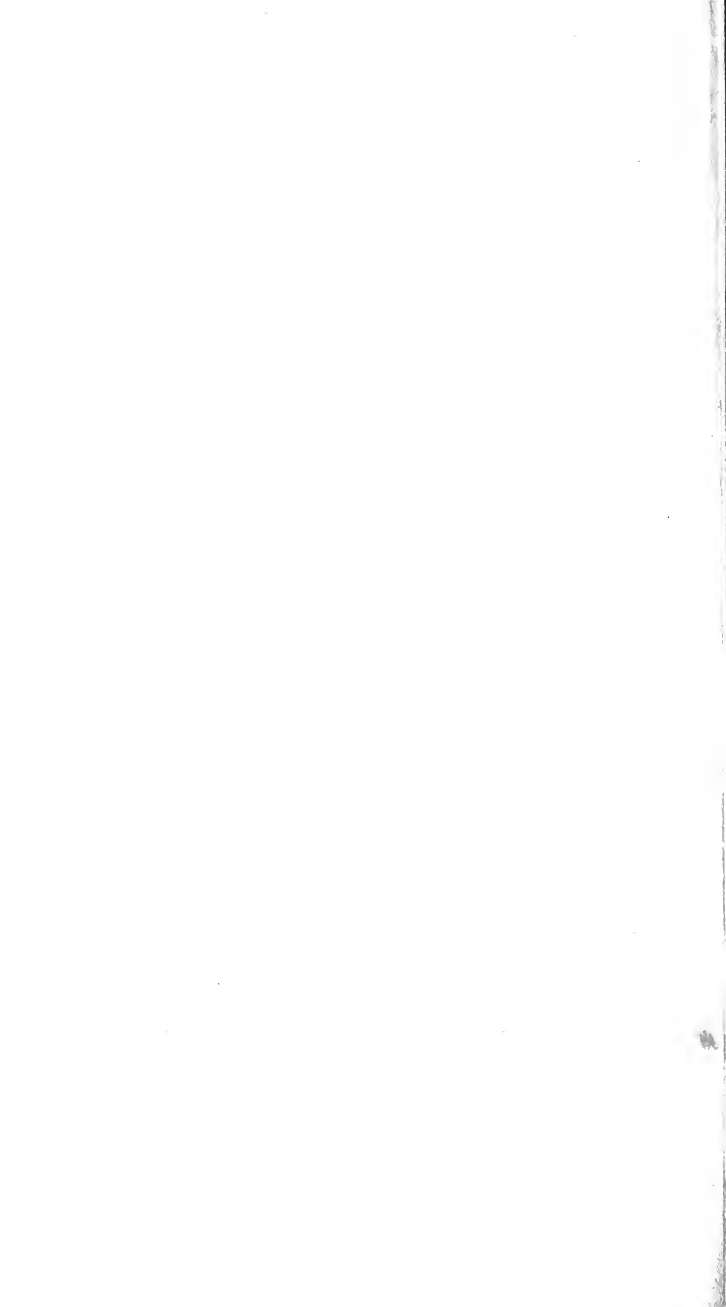
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